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March 2004

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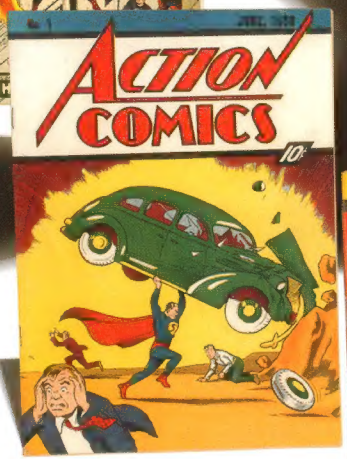


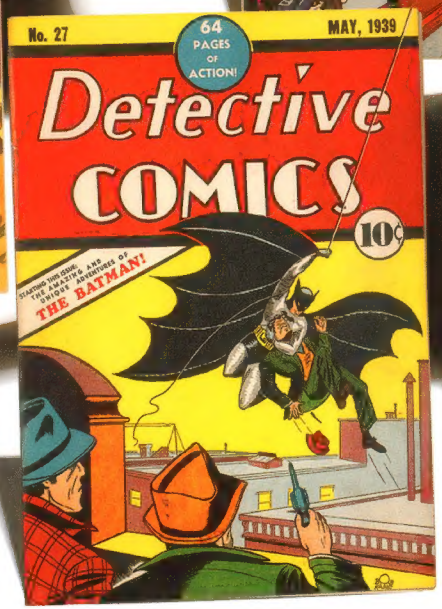


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COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

A GEMSTONE PUBLICATION

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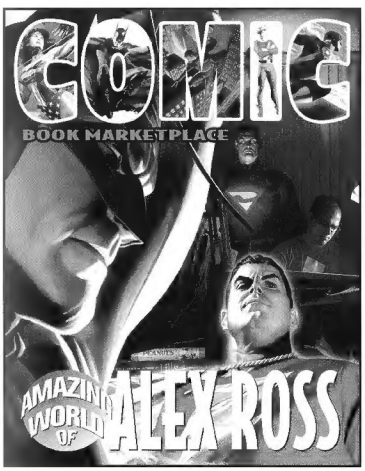


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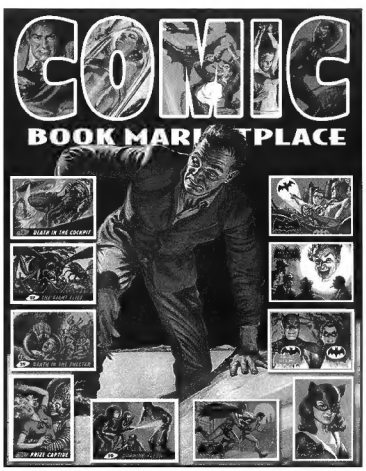



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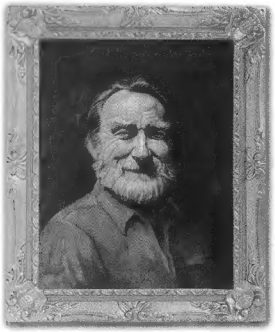

# Letters, We Get Letters

It's not every day you get an eight-page letter from Paul Levitz, President of DC Comics. Paul's response to Dave Blanchard's article in *CBM* 108 about the "End of the DC Silver Age" can be found on page 6. Sometimes this job can get you down and make you wonder if you're not trying to paddle upstream, and then you get a letter like this which shows that the man at the very top of the DC ladder is reading *CBM* and offering to share his opinion with other *CBM* readers.

After getting a nice letter like that, from someone I respect, I was again pleasantly surprised with the feedback I received from my recent editorial regarding some proposed changes in this magazine. Some of the more thoughtful responses can be found in the "Marketplace Mail" section of this issue on page 6. Readers were evenly split on changing the title of the magazine and on putting less emphasis on analyzing the marketplace. These same readers were unanimous in their praise of Michelle Nolan and feature writers like Jon Berk and Will Murray. I was pleased to find such a high degree of support for the magazine in its present form, so any changes I make will be slow and gradual. It seems that we all agree that the primary mission of *CBM* is to feature articles by knowledgeable collectors about comic books (primarily Golden and Silver Age), containing lots of color illustrations. We also agree that one of the most interesting departments each month is "Marketplace Mail." These things won't change in *CBM*.

But the business of buying and selling comic books has changed remarkably over the past ten years, and one of the effects of this has been a huge loss of advertising for magazines like *CBM*. I would like to encourage buyers and sellers to place modest ads in each issue of *CBM*, directing our readers to their website or other place of business. Every month *CBM* goes into the homes of between four and six thousand serious comic collectors. I would venture to guess that a huge majority of these collectors will spend several hours perusing each issue of *CBM*, and for $50 per month (or less) you can reach these collectors with a small ad.

Finally, about the marketplace section. As you will see from the letters, there is a difference of opinion on this section as it now exists. Realizing that there is no possible way for a printed monthly publication to keep up with day-to-day fluctuations in the marketplace and knowing that other publications like the *Overstreet Comic Price Review* are providing this service for collectors, it still seems that *CBM* could be discussing market fluctuations. Our market coverage consists of three parts: Michael Naiman's column of news and opinion, the "Market Watch" page (prices realized in recent sales), and "Market Reports," in which dealers from the US and England discuss their recent sales. Readers, how useful are these three sections to *you*? Specifically, how would you like to see this section changed? How can we improve the market reports from the dealers?

This latest flurry of letters has encouraged me to think that *CBM* is moving in the right direction. If you, the *CBM* reader, will agree to continue writing letters with your feedback, both positive and negative, then I, as your editor, promise to listen to your input and to continue to try to make *CBM* the greatest monthly publication for comics fans.

Russ


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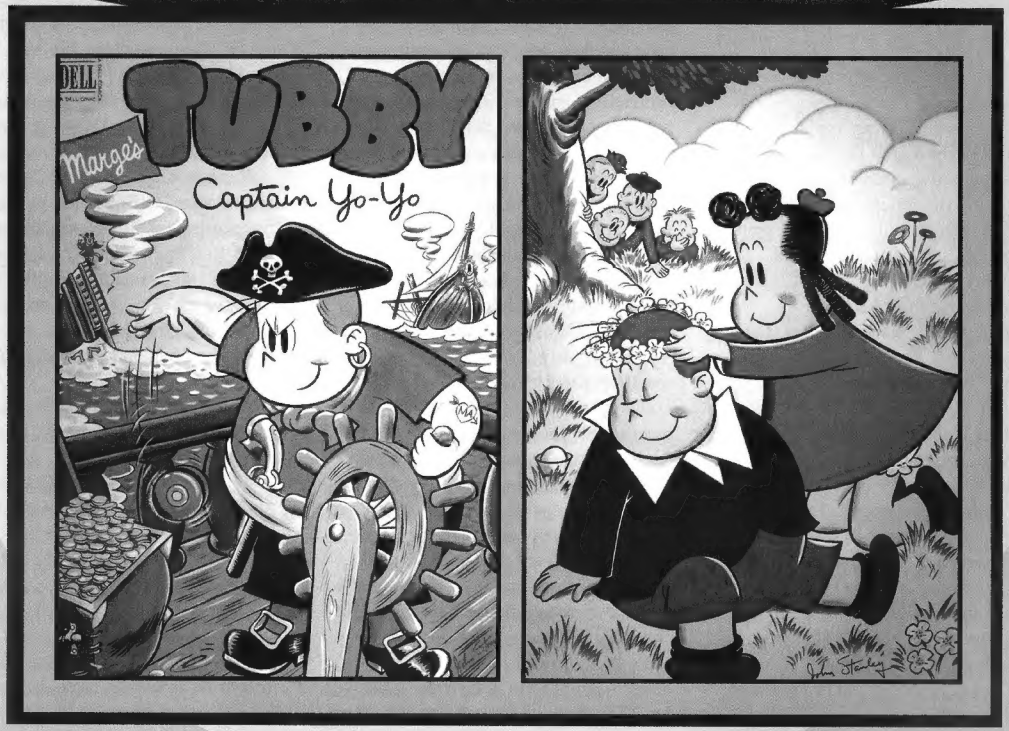


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# Marketplace Mail

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**Other ends, other means**

*This is what we love best about working at* CBM*! Hearing from our readers with a well-written counter-argument. Thanks to Paul Levitz, DC President, for taking the time to write down his thoughts on "Carbon Dating the End of DC's Silver Age" by Dave Blanchard (see* CBM *#108 for Dave's article).*

*Russ Cochran*

While I salute the effort you put into your recent *Comic Book Marketplace* article trying to pin down the end of the Silver Age at DC, I'd like to offer an alternative point of view. Having arrived at the DC offices as a regular visitor just after the Silver Age (by pretty much any basis of calculation), and known most of the Silver Age DC team well, I'd suggest three bases for calculation that are better than the simple markers like last 12-cent issue or last "National" bullet on the cover:

My first alternative is a technological one. I think a case can be made that the Silver Age ended when Chemical Color (the color separator for both DC and Marvel at the time) switched from accommodating the twice-up art boards that had been the standard since the beginning of comics to the 10"x15" (one-and-a-half up) boards that are the modern art size. For many of the great artists of the time, this caused substantial changes in their styles. Although the printed size was unchanged, working in a different physical fashion made them rethink their work. Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Gil Kane and Murphy Anderson are all examples of artists whose styles shifted during that period, and I'd argue those changes marked the visual change out of the Silver Age and into a new period. This marker has the advantage of affecting both of the industry's leading publishers roughly simultaneously.

My second alternative is a commercial one. While I believe it's less strong than the first argument (because comics history should be driven by art, not commerce), a case can be made that the Silver Age ended when Marvel's distribution arrangements changed to allow them to produce more titles. The expansion of the Marvel line in 1967 (with the end of the double-feature titles and the launch of the solo titles), even before they left Independent News, changed the balance of opportunity incomes. It opened up assignments that began pulling artists back and forth between companies, and increased both creative and commercial competition and volatility. The Silver Age is perhaps most distinct for its stability: artists and writers staying on assignments longer than in any other period of comics history, and titles remaining relatively stable at the major publishers as well.

My third alternative is along the lines of your article, but with an emphasis on the human dimension of change. The Silver Age was very much an editorial-driven Age at DC, with editors having specific writers and artists working exclusively for them (often staying on a specific title for the length of the Age). If the list is to be evaluated title by title, I'd suggest that the moments of transition be based on change not only in the fiction of the characters, but the creative casts. Much of this change stemmed from the increasing role Carmine Infantino took as editorial director, and the new editors he either brought in or encouraged to experiment, so I would date the end of the Silver Age at DC in many cases a bit earlier than you did, to when those effects were felt.

Title by title, then, but with a different basis for analysis:

***Action Comics*** #392, as you said. The end of editor Mort Weisinger's run should be definitive for the Superman titles, as it resulted both in changes in the character, supporting characters and creative teams.

***Adventure Comics*** #396, also agreed on the same logic.

***Aquaman*** #39 (May/Jun 1968) instead of #56. The end of Bob Haney's and Nick Cardy's long run since the title's inception. Although credited to Dick Giordano as editor, it's almost certainly initiated by departing editor George Kashdan. Subsequent team Steve Skeates and Jim Aparo are clearly post-SA DC talents.

***The Atom*** #37 (Jun/Jul 1968) instead of ***Atom & Hawkman*** #45 (Oct/Nov 1969). SA DC included no "split hero" titles, and the long run of Gardner Fox and Gil Kane ends here. Number 38 (Aug/Sep 1968) could be argued either way, but as a "fill-in" by Frank Robbins (who was a post-SA DC writer) and Mike Sekowsky, I'd argue it is after the cut.

***Batman*** #202 (Jun 1968) is the last issue credited to Bob Kane and produced by "ghosts," before the post-SA team of Frank Robbins and Irv Novick steps in. Although the breakup of Batman and Robin which you cite is an important moment, it's this point that steps away from a tradition that went back to before the SA began.

***Blackhawk*** #241, agreed.

***Bob Hope*** #109 (Feb/Mar 1968), the end of the run.

***The Brave & the Bold*** #78 (Jun/Jul 1968) is the last issue before Neal Adams' groundbreaking run, and the last issue probably started by departing editor George Kashdan.

***Capt. Action*** #5, agreed.

***Challengers of the Unknown*** #63 (Aug/Sep 1968) is the last issue by artist Bob Brown who had taken the series over from Jack Kirby long before, and probably the last written by Arnold Drake, one of their longtime scripters. Jack Sparling takes over as artist the following issue, definitely a post-SA DC contributor, and Bob Kanigher's scripting indicates Bob's shift from editing to writing for other editors, another post-SA marker.

***Detective Comics*** #376 (Jun 1968) which was the last "Bob Kane" signed issue or #377 (Jul 1968) which was the last to feature the Kane ghost style even though his credit is left off. Well before the issue you cite (#394) we have

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contributions by Frank Robbins (post-SA DC), Bob Brown (never previously a Julie Schwartz contributor), and the end of the Elongated Man back-up in #383 which defined *Detective* for the SA.

***Doom Patrol*** #121, as you said.

***The Flash*** #174 (Nov 1967). Carmine's last issue as the artist of The Flash. If an artist's connection to a character defined the SA, surely this was it? And, as argued above, it was Carmine's increasing executive role that led to many of the other post-SA changes, so the end of his art tenure ties to that as well. Finally, #175 not only introduces Ross Andru as the regular penciler, but includes a fill-in script by Nelson Bridwell (probably his first work for Julie Schwartz, another sign of the editorial walls breaking down) and a guest-shot by Superman, which would have been impossible under the editorial rules that dominated the SA.

***G.I. Combat*** #131 (Aug/Sep 1968) is nominally the first issue edited by Joe Kubert, but more important, preceded a fill-in issue with the Haunted Tank drawn by Mike Sekowsky, an artist who never was associated with Kanigher's war titles in the SA.

***Green Lantern*** is a tough one, since the classic team breaks up early and then is reunited after stories by post-SA Mike Friedrich and Jack Sparling, but since John Broome and Gil Kane reunite for several issues, I'll agree with your call of #75.

***Hawkman*** #21 (Aug/Sep 1967) is the last issue by the longtime team of Gardner Fox and Murphy Anderson who depart with editor Julie Schwartz. Note that Murph ends the last panel with a journalist's sign-off of "-30-."

***House of Mystery*** #173, agreed.

***Inferior Five*** #10 (Sep/Oct 1968), the end of the run.

***Jerry Lewis*** #121 (Nov/Dec 1970), the end of the run.

***Jimmy Olsen*** #132, agreed.

***Justice League of America*** #65, agreed.

***Lois Lane*** #104 (Sep/Oct 1970). Here's one of the few I date much later than you do. Although #80 plays with a liberation theme, the talent on the series remains the same, and the stories really revert immediately back to classic SA. I suggest the last Weisinger issue, after which the book changes totally (e.g., new talent, the Rose & Thorn strip added as the first non-Superman-related back-up in a Superman family title since the early '60s).

***Metal Men*** #29 (Jan/Feb 1967) was the last by Bob Kanigher, Ross Andru and Mike Esposito, the series' creators. The following two issues were actually edited (uncredited) by Julie Schwartz, written by Otto Binder and penciled by Gil Kane.

***Metamorpho*** #17, agreed.

***Our Army at War*** #195 (Jul 1968), primarily on this being Joe Kubert's first issue as editor. Joe made fewer changes in *OAAW* than the other war titles, but it still marks the end of Bob Kanigher's SA run.

***Our Fighting Forces*** #122, agreed.

***Plastic Man*** #10, agreed.

***Scooter*** #13 (Jun/Jul 1968) is the last "illustrative" issue before the cartoon style of Henry Scarpelli, imported to lead the post-SA Archie-style titles, takes over.

***Showcase*** #71 (Nov/Dec 1967). My other radical disagreement with your analysis is *Showcase*. Although *Showcase* #4 ushered in the SA, that's hardly reason to include the whole run in the period. The first few issues are clearly pre-SA material, and after #71, *Showcase* is the title most emblematic of the change in DC. Number 72 is a reprint issue (only the second in the run), and from #73 on we begin a parade of new DC features that are all post-SA on several criteria: talent new to DC (e.g., Ditko, Post, Albano, Wrightson), brought either by Carmine directly or by new editors he was recruiting, and which immediately went on to their own titles after a single *Showcase*.

***Stanley & His Monster*** #112 (Oct/Nov 1968) is a clean evolution from *Fox & Crow*, a long-running DC title, and is produced by classic SA DC talent.

***Star Spangled War Stories*** #137, agreed.

***Strange Adventures*** #204 (Sep 1967). I'd place the whole Deadman run as post-SA, given its dependency on Neal Adams' work.

***Sugar & Spike*** is actually the title I'd argue marks the last of the Silver Age. Shelly Mayer's work is unchanged through the end of the original run (#98 Oct/Nov 1971). You can even make an argument that *Sugar & Spike* #99 (a SA classic published in 1992) is essentially the last original comic of the SA since it featured Shelly's work just as it was.

***Superboy*** #149 (Jul 1968) is the last Mort Weisinger issue (although credited to Murray Boltinoff, it looks like Murray was just closing up some of Mort's inventory before introducing his new team of Frank Robbins and Bob Brown). Your earlier cutoff would exclude the SA origin story of the Legion in #147.

***Superman*** #232, agreed.

***Teen Titans*** #17 (Sep/Oct 1967) is the last by the SA team of Bob Haney and Nick Cardy, even though edited by Dick Giordano. Number 18 is by all post-SA DC talent (Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Bill Draut), and by the issue you suggested we've already gone through the introduction of the new Wonder Girl costume, Neal Adams art and issues that were part of a controversial and ultimately rejected plan to introduce DC's first black super-hero.

***Tomahawk*** #117 (Jul/Aug 1968) is the last illustrated by Fred Ray, who had been with the feature since the beginning. Subsequent issues transitioned to Frank Thorne who is definitely post-SA at DC.

***Unexpected*** #103 (Oct/Nov 1967) rather than #104. Number 103 was the last Green Glob story, the last with the old logo, and #104 (although it was still *Tales of the Unexpected*) began the use of the word unexpected in the closing captions of the stories, a motif that lasted for years afterward.

***Wonder Woman*** #172 (Sep/Oct 1967) was the last issue by Bob Kanigher, Ross Andru and Mike Esposito, who did the entire SA run.

*World's Finest Comics* #197, agreed.

With respect to the romance titles, I'd suggest that the change is generally the last issue of Jack Miller as editor before his replacements step in (the first and only period when the romance books were divided between various DC editors), which is also marked by a new or enlarged logo and the beginning of a shift in artists. The specific last SA issues would be:

***Falling In Love*** #105 (Feb 1969)
***Girls' Love Stories*** #141 (Feb 1969)
***Girls' Romances*** #139 (Mar 1969) was credited to Murray Boltinoff as editor but appears to be all Miller material
***Heart Throbs*** #119 (Apr/May 1969)
***Secret Hearts*** #134 (May 1969)
***Young Love*** #72 (Jan/Feb 1969)
***Young Romance*** #153 (Apr/May 1968)

Finally, I'd exclude entirely the following titles from the SA, even though they launch in its last gasps:

***Anthro***, ***Bat Lash***, ***Beware the Creeper***, ***The Hawk & The Dove***, ***Angel & the Ape***, ***Phantom Stranger*** – all titles launched from *Showcase* using post-SA DC talent

***Brother Power the Geek*** – post-SA DC talent

***DC Special***, ***From Beyond the Unknown***, ***Three Mousketeers*** – reprint material

***Hot Wheels*** – the talent working on this were predominantly post-SA DC folks

***Leave it to Binky***, ***Date with Debbi***, ***Windy & Willy***, ***Binky's Buddies***, ***Debbi's Dates*** – part of the post-SA return of the teen titles

***The Secret Six*** – post-SA DC talent

***The Spectre*** – Neal Adams' first regular series work for DC, stylistically totally different from the classic SA DC heroes or the SA revival of the character in *Showcase*

***Teen Beat/Beam*** – the first format experiment since *It's Game Time*, before the SA began

***The Witching Hour*** – launched as part of move to what you've termed the Weird Age, and by new editor Dick Giordano

***Bomba, The Jungle Boy*** is a title which I can argue goes either way, since it shifts talent radically in the middle of its short run to post-SA DC people. Take it as a toss-up.

This covers all the titles DC launched through the summer of 1970, when the shifts in format, pricing and the line began to accelerate and the line generally became unrecognizable as its SA ancestor.

Thanks for the great excuse to play with my comics on a wintry day. I haven't had this kind of fun since Mark Evanier ran his backseat editor contest, more years ago than I care to remember. Best,

Paul Levitz
New York NY

**The more things change**

Kudos to you and your staff on *CBM* #107, it's the best issue since Gary Carter left. Jon Berk's article was awesome as usual.

Next, about these new ideas [#108] in your head regarding *CBM*. Some of them are great, some are once again leading us down the wrong path. You *must* realize that Gary Carter had the perfect formula. It seems 95 out of 100 of your subscribers prefer *CBM* in that fashion, as do I. So:

1. Change the name? NO! By far the riskiest idea yet! I like the title.

2. Less emphasis on the market? NO. It's my second favorite section, reading dealer reports and Michael Naiman's column. What you *can* remove is the "Market Watch" page. Seeing prices realized for *Lone Ranger* #75 in VF- for $30 is a waste of space. I'd suggest replacing that with more important and exciting high-end sales. Listing CGC sales would put you in the right century!

3. Add more color pages? Now you're talking! :)

4. Broaden the scope to include everything? NO. Even seeing the statues *every month* is bad enough. We are not interested in *everything else*. Golden Age and Silver Age is *all* we require from you! Perhaps a magazine titled "Everything Else" is what you need.

5. Consider deeper articles—and pay less attention to minute details? Umm, you lost me!?!

6. Put the magazine into mainstream stores, have themed issues, less dated material? I'm sure every magazine wants to be in the mainstream stores, go for it! BTW, you already have themed issues! Less dated material? You are researching the *past* of comics—it's *all* dated! Regards,

West Stephan
(no more cracks on the name please,
I was not around to name me!)
Granada Hills CA

I have every issue of *CBM*. It is the one magazine I look forward to the most each month (I also get *Astronomy*, *National Geographic*, *Discover*, *Scientific American*, *Fortean Times*, *NASCAR Scene*, *Back Issue*, *Comic Book Artist*, *Alter Ego* and *CBG*). I applaud your foresight to change as times and people change, as many of these other magazines have had to do.

I agree with all of your changes mentioned except for the marketplace info. First and foremost, please do not cancel the marketplace info—I would rather see it enhanced. I am not a dealer, but an avid collector. This is the first section I read, and have found it invaluable, highlighting areas I should focus on. I have noticed a trend, using "advisors" who are not the same caliber that *CBM* used to have—their reports are weak and lack insight. As for the *Overstreet Monthly* update, I really would rather buy a mag with a mix of articles and a marketplace overview, not just one on the marketplace. Michelle Nolan is the next place I look. She *always* has something to say of interest, even if I do not collect the specific genre she is mentioning.

I would love to see more on comic-related collectibles, but more so those pre-1980. The statue listing is ok, but I never read it.

I really like the "Oddball Comic" one-pager, and the "Greatest Comic Book Ever" articles.

I love the letters, especially the ones dealing with the marketplace, or those looking back on comics as a kid and how they influenced them. I also enjoy those debating the state of comics, CGC and its impact, etc.

It would be great if the interviews are

few and far between. I get a lot of this info already through *Comic Book Artist*, *Back Issue* and *Alter Ego*. The interviews to date in *CBM* have been no more insightful than these other periodicals.

I thought issue 108 has been the best of your run to date (except for the weak marketplace section). The balance of different articles and genres was perfect. I enjoyed seeing the Marvel Paperback article!

A few suggestions:

More on platinum comics.

An article on "digests." This would include the Gold Key, Marvel and DC digests. I believe these are hugely undervalued and really cool—how many times as a kid did my generation take these on vacation (especially since you could carry more in less space!).

An article on the "Treasury editions," both DC and Marvel. I have collected these for years, and boy is it tough to get a complete NM collection.

An article on the effects radio, TV and film have had on comic book circulation and fandom would be interesting. Radio shows, serials, the *Batman* TV show, the Dell/Gold Key tie-ins, Superman 1977, Batman 1989, and current X-Men and Spidey movies would make an "awesome" story, spanning the entire history. I believe these are greatly linked.

As for the simple name "*COMICS!*", it is better than *CBM*. But it still seems to lack something. Sorry, I don't have a suggestion.

Mark Hartman
Atlanta GA

Just received *CBM* #108. Another stellar example of the best comics publication in the business.

I truly like the new format. I believe you've taken a great magazine and transformed it into an excellent one. The addition of more current comic-related products and books, statues, etc., merged with classic Golden, Silver and Bronze information makes the book more interesting and diverse.

As a frequent letter writer and contributor to *CBM*, I'd like to see the book retain its current format. Do you remember in 1985 when Coca Cola decided to change the formula and introduce New Coke? That proved to be a disaster. I believe the current magazine is excellent as it is!! That doesn't mean it can't include different types of comic book information.

I believe the strength of the magazine is the articles are the work of true collectors. This magazine is in the purest sense a professional fanzine.

One change that I would like to see would be the occasional article on collecting original comic book art, along with prices and examples. There's no greater thrill than owning a piece of art from a comic that I love. How much closer can you get to the magic than the art? There's a tremendous feeling of connection when you hold a piece of original art, you can see the pencil lines, the corrections, the comments in the margins, etc.

I'd also like to suggest a new monthly feature be added, [a column] dealing with a collector's special acquisition. I'd call this piece "The Holy Grail." It would deal with a collector's quest to acquire the most important item in their collection. It won't have to be the most valuable piece, but then again it might be very expensive. The item would have to be the one they had dreamed about for years, searched high and low for. I started to think of this feature after I read about Raymond A. Cuthbert's search for and acquisition of the art from *Two-Gun Kid* #60 in *CBM* #98.

John R. Stuart
Ontario Canada

As an eclectic collector I find *CBM* to be almost perfect. I love wandering down the paths of the Golden Age heroes one minute and then laughing at the antics of funny critters in the opposite fork in the road. I look forward to "The Greatest Comic Book Ever" in one breath followed by comic-related statues in the next.

I appreciate your commenting that this is our publication (I've been disappointed when you have made some comments such as calling your readership lazy).

1. Do not change the name. *Comic Book Marketplace* represents to me the very eclectic nature that I seek.

2. I find the current emphasis on market analysis to be just right. I look forward to hearing from dealers in all parts of the country and how business is going. I realize it's slightly dated, however it still connects me with the marketplace.

3. I have no complaint with more color! I realize too much could lead to a price increase, chasing some subscribers away (the more the merrier so you can continue to publish). Your suggestion of reprinting whole comic books—Yes!! I would purchase every reprint I could. In this day and age reprints may be the only way some of us may be able to enjoy these American treasures.

4. I feel you have already broadened the scope at *CBM*, but feel free to continue.

5. I greatly appreciate scholarly articles but I feel you have taken this almost to the extreme. My first and strongest connection to *CBM* is its ability to invite me into the collecting community. I felt part of this community, with the editor even soliciting articles from fellow collectors. The current magazine lacks this. I suggest occasional articles by your readership.

6. I like your ideas for a new magazine called *COMICS!* However I would like to see it as a separate publication, not as a replacement.

My only other comment on *CBM* in its current format concerns article length. In my eclectic nature I enjoy quick-n-slick articles. I would like the in-depth long articles to be split into more than one issue. On the upside this allows for more diversity per issue and makes allowances for readers who may not want to spend all their efforts on one subject.

John R. Gibson
Riverton UT

I am a long time Fan; I go all the way back to *Overstreet's FAN*. I am writing to respond to your suggestions for changes to *CBM*. I like some of them but others leave me depressed.

Changing the name isn't all that bad. If you're going to put less emphasis, if any, on the market, then the name probably shouldn't have the word "marketplace" in it. So, go ahead; *COMICS!* is fine.

You have valid points on the analysis issue so I agree, you should put less

emphasis on the market analysis. Things are not the same as when *CBM* started and I commend you for noticing and attempting to do something about it.

Broadening the scope and adding color pages are both good as well, but the concept that there is overlap between *CBM* and other publications sounds like a "copout."

I don't mean to sound "mean" but maybe, it's *them* that are overlapping with *CBM*. Don't sell yourself short, and in effect give up to them. There may be things you want to do differently and I'm thankful that you are asking the readers about them, but do them because *CBM* is on the cutting edge and not just trying to scrape by among the other fanzines.

I don't know, maybe it's me that is blowing this out of proportion but it just struck me as wrong when I read it. Overall, the ideas are good and should be considered if not outright done by *CBM*, I mean, *COMICS!*

Dwayne Wilder
(a 30-year comics reader)
Denison TX

*Comic Book Marketplace* #108 was a real winner. "Black Market Comic Books of the Golden Age" was my favorite article as it contained all the aspects that has prompted me to never miss an issue—a well-researched perspective and appreciation on a subject unique to your publication, and color cover reproductions.

I'm primarily writing concerning your proposed changes in your magazine. I have been a reader of comics and magazines for 45 years and you can bet anything that I read regularly has changed considerably. Successful ones changed incrementally, a few changed their title—that is risky. As I read your editorial I had the impression you wished to edit a different magazine. No offense, Russ, but in this arena you are not a pioneer—that was Gary Carter. I feel you are creative and eager to reach your stride.

You mentioned your competition. I read and appreciate all of the ones you listed. Keep market analysis, but put it in the form of interviews with key dealers and collectors. Reproduce color covers of the issues Gerber did not show. I am skeptical that expanding your scope would actually increase your sales that much. Do what you must, but make sure you clearly see the answer to the big question—"Why?"

Bob Pujol
St. Louis MO

I too have longed to see the marketplace stuff get the boot. My particular interests have always been content within the comic, I support a move in that direction. But I have a couple of caveats.

You need to find another title than *COMICS!*. Former comic book editor and Steve Ditko's personal editor Robin Snyder has been producing an oral history comic book fanzine since 1990. Its current title (and has been for years) is *The Comics*. Aside from any possible copyright problem, your interest in having a publication with the same name as one that is closely identified with Steve Ditko's Objectivist viewpoint may be problematic to you.

Color is fine, but is never cheap. You may end up with a fanzine like *Comic Art*, which is very well done, but at $9 makes even a fan like me purchase only when it has a topic of special interest to me. If you want to be a general interest zine, don't price yourself into more of a niche than you already are. A squarebound TPB version of *CBM* (*Gold & Silver Age Collector*) had been tried once before by Overstreet a decade ago, and failed. Be careful which way you decide to venture.

Scholarly articles are great, but try not to compete with John Lent's huge quarterly *International Journal of Comic Art*. You might end up duplicating efforts, or even worse, have articles that ponder great things, but bore the reader to death.

Ray Bottorff Jr, Acting Board Chairman
Grand Comic-Book Database
www.comics.org,
Detroit MI

It is difficult to me to help you because I am just a reader with curiosity and not an expert with knowledge.

You mention the change of name of *CBM*. In my opinion the name *CBM* is good: the term Marketplace is all-encompassing (publishers, artists, writers, distributors); the term Book as well, and Comic *is* the arena. Then you can extend the limits and contents of your magazine wherever you want (counseling, advising, critics, history, artists, countries, etc.). Also, after 110 issues it is an established name!

You mention the overlap with other magazines. I like to compare different opinions because in this sophisticated life of ours it is the information, sound and not adulterated, given by different experts that helps us. *CBM* has a quality that differentiates it favorably from other magazines.

Regarding the [reprinting of] comics, I agree that every one of us has a lost comic we would like to see, but in my opinion it should be published only when it reinforces the article about the artist or character. Out of this context the [reprint] could be disappointing.

My interest is now what you call the "unsung heroes" of comics and I have enjoyed the recent articles on John Celardo and Paul Norris. It is easy to write a list of thirty names, and every reader has his own! However, I find *CBM* most complete and just for curiosity I like the articles on the value of comics and the ways or difficulties to find them.

I conclude that I like *CBM* as it is now. The authors, subjects, photos, reproductions, colors and paper are excellent, and this is the reason for me to be a satisfied customer/reader.

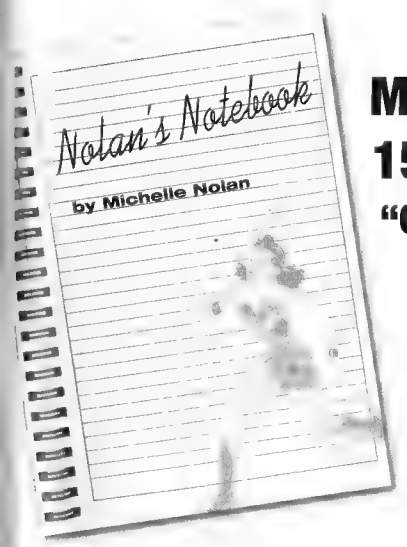
Jaime Echevarria
via e-mail

Regarding your comments in the editorial in #108, I've been buying *CBM* since issue 82.

My vote would be to retain the existing name, after all why build a brand name only to ditch it after 108+ issues? That said, I guess the content is the most important thing and I would continue to support the magazine whatever the name. If your market research shows that you would sell more copies with a different title then go right ahead.

The market analysis side of the mag is definitely the least interesting bit and I would be happy to see a cut. I'd be interested in seeing public domain strips

*[continued on page 76]*




# Much More Than 15 Cents Worth of Fun

## "Comic Cavalcade" was a unique experiment

Of all the dozens of comic book that dropped super-heroes at the end of the Golden Age, two of the most unfairly maligned were *All Star Western* and *Comic Cavalcade*.

The operative here is "were," since both DC titles in recent years have begun to achieve much-deserved recognition in their own right.

When the Justice Society of America disappeared for more than a decade following its last Golden Age appearance in *All Star Comics* #57 (Feb/Mar 1951), three of the JSA's big guns—Green Lantern, The Flash and Wonder Woman—already had been replaced two years earlier in another title.

That title, of course, was *Comic Cavalcade*, which cover-featured those three heroes for its first 29 issues from 1943-48 in one of the few 15-cent "giant" comics on the market. Those three worthies were among the heroes to be replaced by DC's growing stable of funny animals, causing most collectors to ignore *Comic Cavalcade* #30-63 for many years. I'm glad I didn't, though, even if it did take me a good many years to find them all. The funny animal incarnation of *Comic Cavalcade* is one of the most enjoyable of all the so-called "Atom Age" titles.

*Comic Cavalcade* was unique in its time. Not only was it a huge bargain at 15 cents for 76 pages including covers (#30-47) and then 68 pages (#48-63), but there was nothing else like it appearing regularly on the stands. Dell began publishing its 25-cent funny animal squarebound giants in 1949, but none on a bimonthly basis during the era of *Comic Cavalcade*.

*World's Finest*, the best-selling home for Superman and Batman for so many years, obviously was much more successful than *Comic Cavalcade*, though even *World's Finest* was cut from the 15-cent, 68-page format at the same time *Comic Cavalcade* was cancelled in 1954.

*Comic Cavalcade*, however, was a spectacular showcase for DC's highly underrated funny animal strips. Many fans don't realize that by 1949, DC had become a leading publisher of anthropomorphic antics, and most of the characters originated well before the majority of the company's super-heroes were discontinued. In fact, the first transition title in DC's history was *Leading Comics*, and the shift was from a "second-string" super-hero team, the Seven Soldiers of Victory, to funny animals with #15 (Summer 1945). The change apparently was a significant success, since *Leading* ran for a full decade through #77 (Aug/Sep 1955), usually featuring Peter Porkchops.

DC waited 3-1/2 years to make a similar transition with *Comic Cavalcade* #30 (Dec 1948-Jan 1949). By that time, the company already had been publishing five well-established funny animal titles—*Funny Stuff* (led by The Dodo and the Frog), *Real Screen* (featuring The Fox and the Crow), *Leading* (Peter Porkchops), *Animal Antics* (Raccoon Kids) and *Funny Folks* (Nutsy Squirrel). *Comic Cavalcade* became DC's sixth funny animal title, featuring characters plucked from the other five. They included almost all of the funniest folks except Peter Porkchops, who never appeared in *Comic Cavalcade*.

Including *Peter Porkchops* #1 (Nov/Dec 1949), DC published no fewer than 42 funny animal comics in 1949! That represents nearly 20 percent of the company's 229 issues published that year. Somebody must have loved this funny stuff!

It's no wonder the company began running a long series of house ads in 1951 telling readers that "Some of Superman's best friends were squirrels! Yes, and foxes, and crows, and pigs, and rabbits, and every other kind of forest friend you can imagine—and some you can't imagine!" Superman is shaking hands with Nutsy Squirrel! Indeed, in 1952 and 1953, The Fox and the Crow appeared in as many regularly published comics in each of those two years (24 issues

Comic Cavalcade
NOW TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO PUT IN MY PLAY-ROOM AND I'M ALL SET!
DOODLES! YOO HOO! DOODLES!
OH! OH! HERE COMES BUTTONS! I DON'T WANT HIM TO CATCH ME!
DOODLES! THERE YOU ARE!
HE'S GOT ME! I MIGHT AS WELL TAKE MY MED CINE!
COME LOOK WHAT HAPPENED TO MY PLAY-ROOM!
NO! NO! I'M INNOCENT! I DIDN'T DO IT!
ISN'T IT WONDERFUL? SOMEBODY PUT ALL THIS WONDERFUL STUFF IN HERE, AND I MADE A MINIATURE GOLF COURSE!
WANNA PLAY? MY RULES!
THE End

Doodles Duck in **Comic Cavalcade** #45 (Jun-Jul 1951).

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covering three titles) as Superman and Batman did!

DC published well over 50 different funny animal strips form the 1940s to the 1960s, but it only seemed as though they all appeared in *Comic Cavalcade*. Even so, an astonishing 36 different characters appeared in the 34 funny-animal issues of *Comic Cavalcade*, including 13 that made only one appearance in the title. The only characters that appeared in all 34 issues were The Fox and the Crow (always the first story in the book), The Dodo and the Frog, and Nutsy Squirrel. They were also featured on every cover except #35, the only cover in which The Fox and the Crow appeared solo.

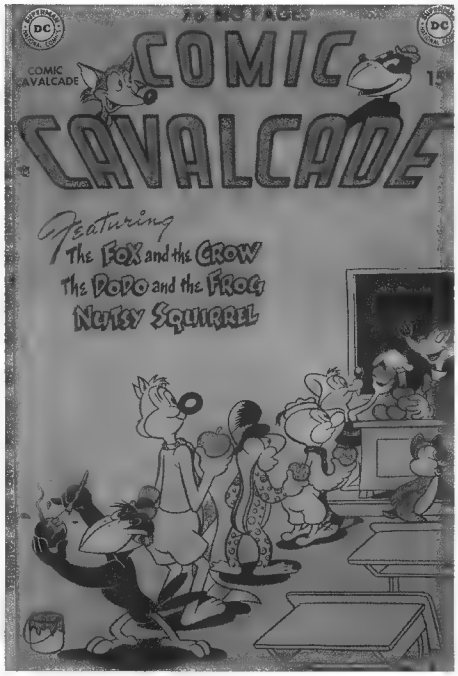
Thanks to the addition of comedic genius Sheldon Mayer's Dizzy Dog, Doodles Duck and Bo Bunny stories, *Comic Cavalcade* significantly improved over the second half of its funny animal run. Mayer first appeared in the title with his initial version of Doodles Duck in #40 (Aug/Sep 1950, the last squarebound issue). In retrospect, though, Mayer's stories in *Comic Cavalcade* were not really a surprise.

Mayer's wonderful *Scribbly* comic book ceased regular publication with #13 (Aug/Sep 1950), though the title staggered to its demise with #14 and #15 a little over a year later. The great cartoonist/ writer/ creator/editor also was still more than five years away from creating his magnum opus, *Sugar & Spike*, and from bringing back The Three Mousketeers in their own title (both in 1956).

Mayer must have paid the bills with Bo Bunny, Doodles Duck and Dizzy Dog in *Comic Cavalcade* and in some issues of *Funny Stuff*, with Doodles also appearing in *Dodo and the Frog* #80-92 after the title changed from *Funny Stuff* #79. To say these clever little strips were fantastically entertaining is an understatement. They still stand up beautifully today—they're nothing short of hilarious!

There are three Mayer stories in *Comic Cavalcade* #41 (a whopping 22 pages worth of Mayer!), three in #42, one in #43, two in #44 and three in #45 (with 21 pages of Mayer), so Mayer fans in recent years have competed furiously with fans of The Fox and the Crow and The Dodo and the Frog for these handsome 76-page issues.

In fact, Mayer appeared in at least one story throughout *Comic Cavalcade* #40-63. The real gems, though, from the standpoint of scarcity and collectability, are #54 and #56-63. These all have three Mayer stories, in addition to The Fox and the Crow and The Dodo and the Frog. These are, without a doubt, among the funniest comics ever published.



**Comic Cavalcade** #45 (Jun-Jul 1951).

They are also among the scarcest comics produced in the 1950s. *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* lists #50-62 as scarce and #63 as rare—all accurate estimations, in my opinion. Apparently, *Comic Cavalcade*'s 15-cent price was a turnoff, even though the reader gained 20-cents worth of material, and brilliant material at that. I can't imaging DC would have discontinued the 15-cent format if it had sold well, but there was an awful lot of 10-cent competition on the stands.

As good as DC's funny animal titles were in the 1950s—and they were absolutely first-rate!—they didn't have even close to the name recognition that Dell's anthropomorphic animals did. In retrospect, it's surprising that DC stuck with them as long as the company did when Dell flooded the stands with humor titles from Disney, Warner Brothers and Walter Lantz, among others.

What made *Comic Cavalcade* unique was the appearance of at least ten different strips of four or more pages in almost every issue, representing at least twenty different animals (most of the strips had multiple creatures). Unlike Dell's style, however, there were only a handful of shorter strips. Yet *Comic Cavalcade* never had the same contents in the same order in consecutive issues, so one gets the feeling that the editors packaged the title with whatever was available to back up Mayer's marvels along with the three constant features.

What makes *Comic Cavalcade* so desirable is the title's crossover appeal to a multitude of Fox and Crow completists, Dodo and Frog enthusiasts and Mayer fanatics, not to mention DC completists. (And I have met a surprising number of DC completists in recent years, or at least people like me who are devoted to a certain DC era. In my case, it's 1948-61.)

It's interesting to study *Comic Cavalcade* #30, which was misdated Dec-Jan 1948 in the indicia. "Brand New Stories Featuring All Your Old Favorites—" began the cover blurb. DC apparently wanted to assure readers that these were original, considering how Fox

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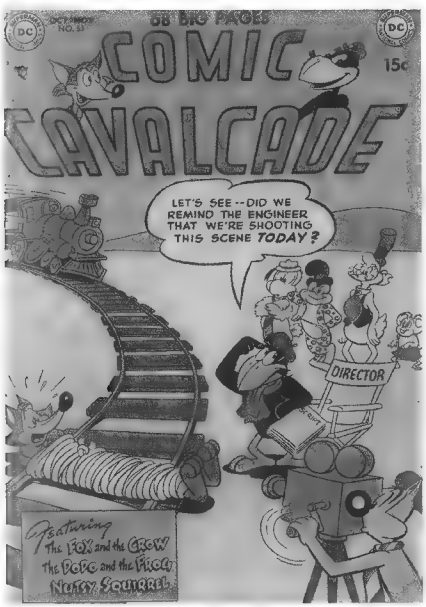
and several other companies had begun to flood the market with rebound giants. It's intriguing to note that the only house ad in the entire issue was a full page featuring the other five regular funny animal publications. And nowhere in the book is there any indication of the genre change, nor any notice that Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman could still be found in their other titles.

*Comic Cavalcade* #38 (Apr/May 1950)


68 BIG PAGES
COMIC CAVALCADE
15¢
LET'S SEE--DID WE REMIND THE ENGINEER THAT WE'RE SHOOTING THIS SCENE TODAY?
DIRECTOR
featuring The FOX and the CROW The DOPE and the FROG Nutsy Squirrel

**Comic Cavalcade** #53 (Oct-Nov 1952).

features a howl of a Nutsy Squirrel story for people who collect baseball parodies—"Nutsy at the Bat." I love stories like this, which show just how deeply baseball is ingrained in the American psyche.

An amusing seven-page dog-and-cat imbroglio entitled "Ruff and Reddy" made its only *Comic Cavalcade* appearance in #40 (Aug/Sep 1950)—seven years before the identically named Hanna-Barbera icons made their bow on television in 1957! I have no idea if there is any connection, nor have I checked all of the DC humor comics in my collection to see if Ruff and Reddy appeared in other titles. Does anyone know if there's a connection? Of course, Ruff is such a comically common name for a dog that Reddy is the logical extension for a feline foil. Even so, it's always fascinating to note when an iconic character actually had a namesake, however unintentional.

In #42, Mayer inexplicably tried a four-page, one-shot *Comic Cavalcade* appearance called "Li'l Chick-A-Dee," which contained no conversation. This strip, in which the title character wins a bet by scoring six bulls-eyes with a rifle while blindfolded, makes absolutely no sense to me. I've tried reading this every which way and I can't understand it at all. It's utterly baffling! Mayer also introduces Dizzy Dog in the Bo Bunny strip.

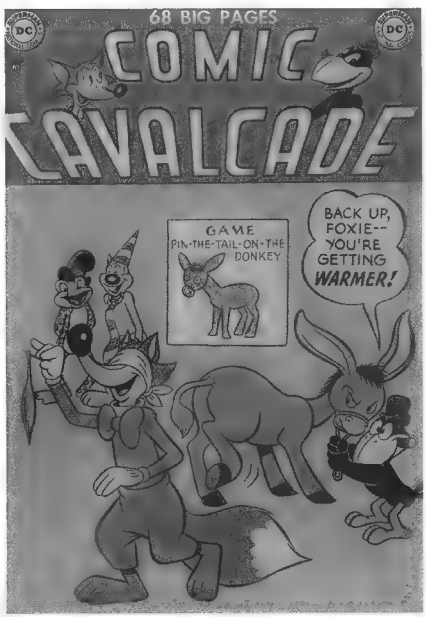
Flippity and Flop, one of my favorite funny animal strips, made only two appearances in *Comic Cavalcade*, a two-page strip in #43 (Feb/Mar 1951) and a seven-page story in #47 (Oct/Nov 1951). Both stories predate *Flippity and Flop* #1 (Dec 1951-Jan 1952). Flippity and Flop date to *Real Screen* #1 (Spring 1945), predating Warner Brothers' first teaming of Sylvester the Cat and Tweety Bird in the 1947 cartoon "Tweetie Pie" (sic), although there were Tweety Bird prototypes as early as 1942, according to *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Cartoon Animals* (1991) by Jeff Rovin. I can't help wondering if DC's Flippity and Flop was an original concept; it seems as if the strip might be. For years, though, I thought it was a knockoff of Warner Brothers'.

*Comic Cavalcade* #63 (Jun/Jul 1954) was, befitting its reputation as rare, the last one of the series I acquired, though I can't remember how. I do remember being excited to get it, since I had seen only one or two copies. There were only four interior ads—only two of them full-page ads—other than the publisher's own.

*Comic Cavalcade* #62 contains one of the oddest ads I've ever seen in a funny animal comic—a full-page plug for the Science-Fiction Book Club! Go figure! I remember joining the club at age 11, in large part because of a comic book ad. In fact, I still have my copy of famed anthologist Groff Conklin's *Omnibus of Science Fiction*, inscribed with the date it arrived—May 15, 1959—as one of my first three books.

Mayer often ended his stories in *Comic Cavalcade* with a panel entitled "Moral." Consider the wisdom of these words following the Doodles Duck story in #61: "If good luck turns a blunder into a stroke of genius, don't pat yourself on the back! Technically, you're still a blunderer!"

To be sure! But you won't be making any blunders if you can find any issues of *Comic Cavalcade*.




Rare last issue #63 (Jun-Jul 1954).

by Pat Calhoun

# Wally Wood's "Galaxy" Gallery

There are at least three good reasons to take a close look at the covers Wally Wood painted for *Galaxy Magazine* in the late 1950s. Firstly, since Wood is one of the top Silver Age super-hero artists and an Atomic Age sci-fi specialist, any chance to present quality work of his that comics fans may not have seen is worthwhile. Secondly, it gives a chance to examine the close relationship of the SF and comics worlds in that era. Thirdly, the paintings are wonderful in and of themselves and are presented here to be enjoyed!

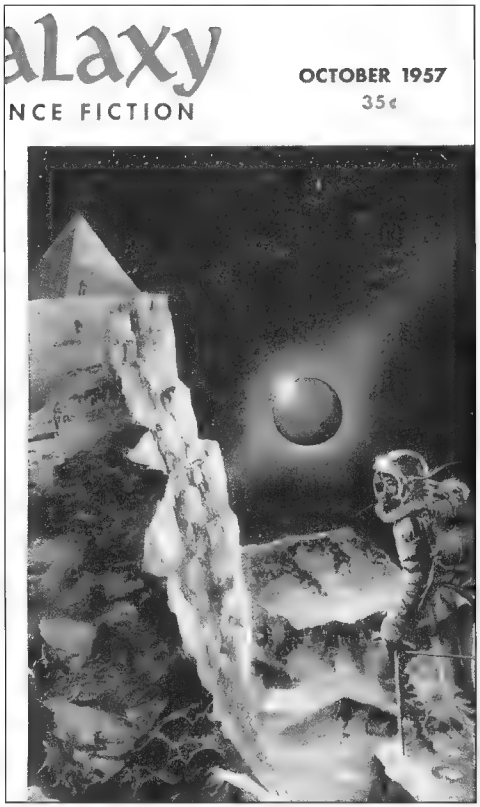
In his treasured work for EC Comics Wood earned a reputation as a master of science fiction art—with covers and stories full of gleaming futuristic cities, intricately machined spaceships, outrageous aliens, and an ample supply of voluptuous women! He worked well in other genres too, but the SF was something special.

And while everyone knows how the adoption of the Comics Code in 1954 put the kibosh on EC, less understood is the enormous impact SF had on the Silver Age. DC revived The Flash in 1956 with a creative team largely composed of veterans of the SF magazines: Julie Schwartz, Mort Weisinger, Gardner Fox, Edmond Hamilton, John Broome, Otto Binder, etc. Then in 1957, when the Russians launched Sputnik into orbit and started the space race, comics—vilified and hounded just a few years previously—now were seen as a good influence on youth as the heavy SF content would hopefully breed a crop of scientists who could give the USA an edge in this new contest. The late 1950s were thus the time when the SF and comics fields overlapped the most.

*Galaxy Magazine* began in October 1950, completing the triad of "modern SF" digest mags that would dominate the 1950s and 1960s. (The *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* started in 1949, following the lead set by *Astounding Science Fiction* which had begun in 1930 and pioneered the modern style—with more emphasis on concepts than adventure—in the late 1930s, switching from "pulp" to digest size in 1946.) In its first decade *Galaxy* published many SF classics: Isaac Asimov's robot detective novel *The Caves of Steel*, Alfred Bester's spectacular future superman novel *The Stars My Destination*, Robert Heinlein's definitive novel of alien invasion *The Puppet Masters*, Theodore Sturgeon's masterful tales of the next step in evolution *More Than Human*, Pohl and Kornbluth's satiric gem of corporate tomorrow *The Space Merchants*, and a host of memorable and entertaining novelettes and short stories as well.

*Galaxy* had some excellent cover artists including Virgil Finlay and Ed Emshmiller, and each issue would also feature a dozen or so pieces of interior art. Wood contributed a fair share of those as well. The 1957-1959 years contain most of his covers and illustrations. (These issues also feature many striking interiors by Leo Dillon.) These were the last of the great years of magazine SF. Many mark the beginning of the end with *Astounding*'s change to *Analog* in 1960. And just as the magazine SF market would soon fade, the comics world of the late 1950s was one of diminished possibilities. Hence, it's no surprise that an artist of Wood's caliber—with an affinity for SF—would "cross the street" for extra work during tough times.

Wally Wood's cover for the October




**Galaxy** (Oct 1957) Wally Wood's cover for "Wolfbane" has a quiet power as humans learn that they are not alone. (The left margin trim results from these mags having been hardbound into volumes of six issues each.)

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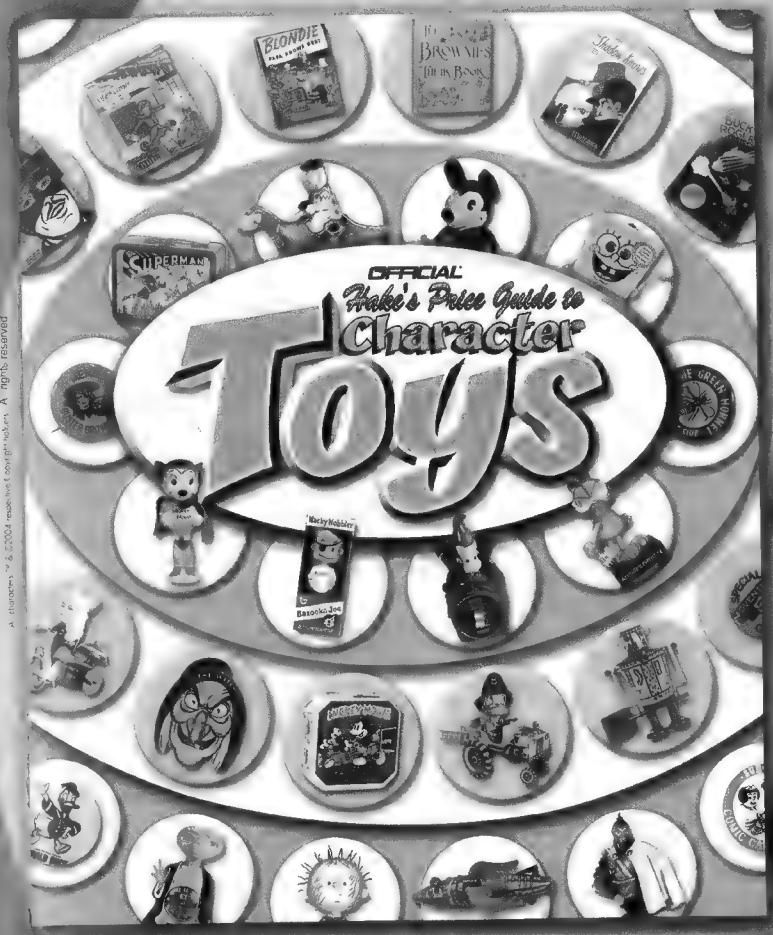


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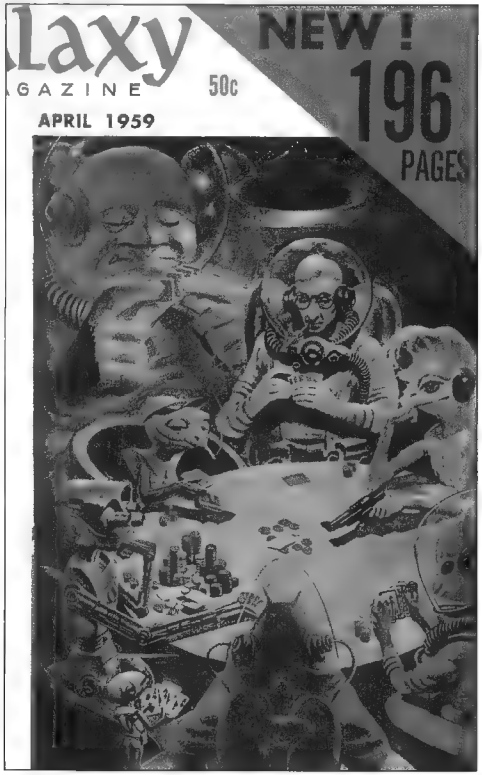


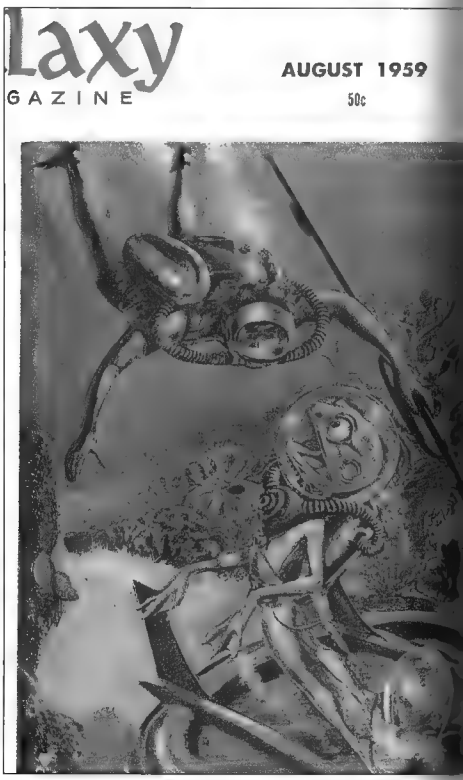

← **Galaxy** (Apr 1959) Nothing warms up interplanetary relations like a poker game. The little alien to the robot's right is holding three aces on this wry Wood classic cover. When **Galaxy** went bi-monthly with the Jan/Feb issue, they beefed up the page count and the price!

**Galaxy** (Nov 1957) Here's a nice example of Wood's interior work, a page-and-a-halfer illustrating part two of Frederick Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's "Wolfbane." The "starburst" of human figures is a compelling image. →

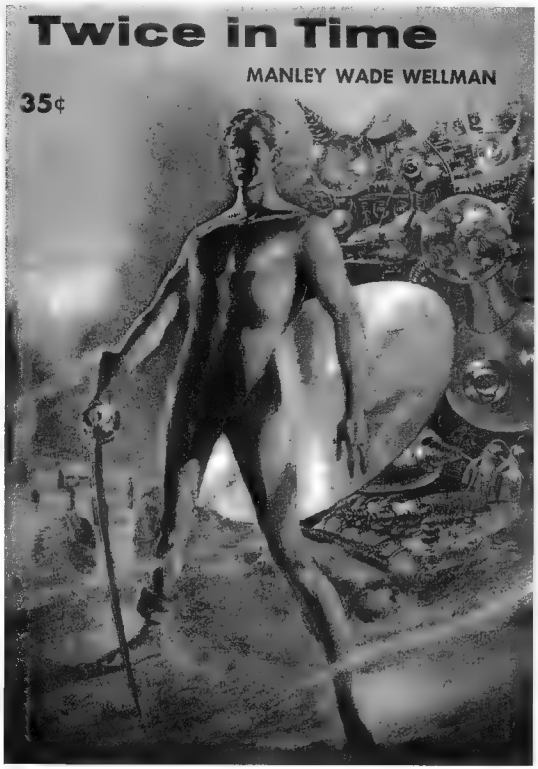
1957 "Wolfbane" seems to be a fairly literal imaging of a scene from this Pohl and Kornbluth yarn where giant alien pyramids kidnap Earth! Wood also provided the interior art for this two-part serial.

Woody's cover of industrial nuking for the August 1958 issue is a strange one. It is one of a number of covers from that period that illustrate a science fiction idea independent of the inside contents. Chief amongst this month's stories is Ted Sturgeon's "To Marry Medusa," a novella of alien telepathic contact that showcases Sturgeon's deeply humanistic storytelling skill and has a couple of nice moody Dillon illos.

← **Galaxy** (Aug 1958) The contents page blurb says these future (2025 AD) firefighters are "neutralizing" the nuclear blasts. This issue also has three handsome Woody interior illos and Theodore Sturgeon's marvelous novella "To Marry Medusa."




**Galaxy** (Aug 1959) Wood's painting skills really shine as a man exploring the underwater world meets an alien amphibian doing a little exploring himself. This issue has nine Wood interiors, plus some superb Dillons and a rare art appearance by MAD's Don Martin. →

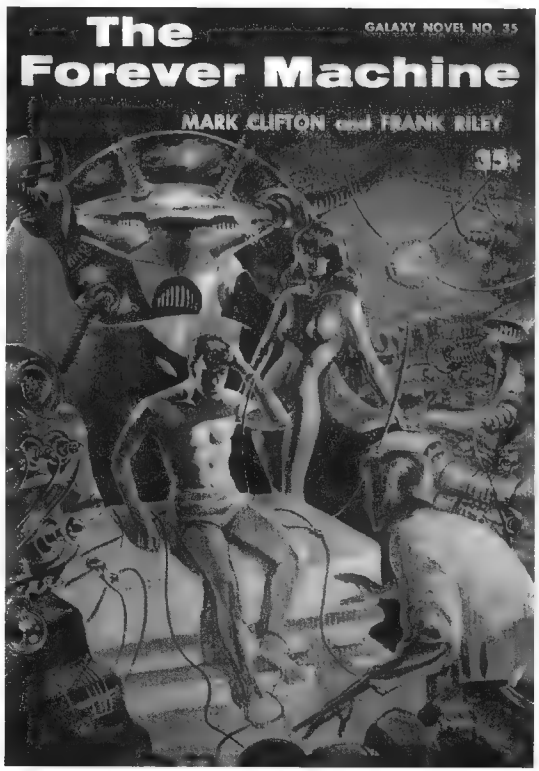



**Galaxy Novel** #34 (1958) Wood's cover shows many fine painterly touches, appropriate to a novel that puts SF spin on the life of the great Renaissance artist and scientist Leonardo da Vinci, "Twice in Time" by Manly Wade Wellman.

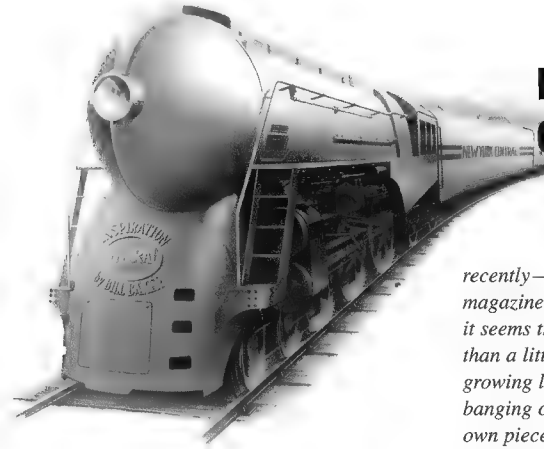
April 1959's interplanetary poker game offers a nice group of Wood "person"-alities. Inside, Daniel F Galoye's "The City of Force" looks like an interesting novelette and has more tasty Dillon art. And August 1959's charming Wood work is given a title on the contents page "1 Up, 1 Down." The authors inside include Clifford D. Simak and Robert Silverberg.

During these boom years *Galaxy* also published a series of SF novel reprints, some in digest form and some as standard 6-1/2" paperbacks. Wood contributed covers for a number of these classics including the "PB" style #34 and #35: *Twice in Time* by Manly Wade Wellman and *The Forever Machine* by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley. The latter title won the Hugo Award (named after Hugo Gernsback, editor and publisher of the first SF mag, *Amazing Stories*, begun in 1926) as best novel of 1955.

At the same time that Wally Wood was doing this *Galaxy* gig he was also inking Jack Kirby's first Silver Age hero team over at DC, *Challengers of the Unknown*. In the 1960s Woody also showed strength as a writer/creator, editor and publisher on such projects as *Thunder Agents*, *Cannon* (a slick super-hero anthology packaged for US GIs), and the pneumatic misadventures of Sally Forth. Wally Wood's *Galaxy* work adds an important chapter to the biography of this great comics artist.




**Galaxy Novel** #35 (1958) Wood's trademark futuristic machinery is almost as curvaceous as his rendering of the female form, and both are on display for this paperback (re-titled) reprint of Mark Clifton and Frank Riley's Hugo winner "They'd Rather Be Right."



# Building a Bigger, Bolder World—One Brush Stroke at a Time

## Painter David Michael Beck on his influences, past and present

**Interview by Bill Baker**

*While he might not be as well-known in our four-color circles as some of his peers, David Michael Beck is no newbie to the business of illustration. In fact, his entrance into the comics world signaled the beginning of a second phase of his career as a commercial artist, the first stage consisting of his spending the better part of the last three decades creating advertising, editorial and entertainment art.*

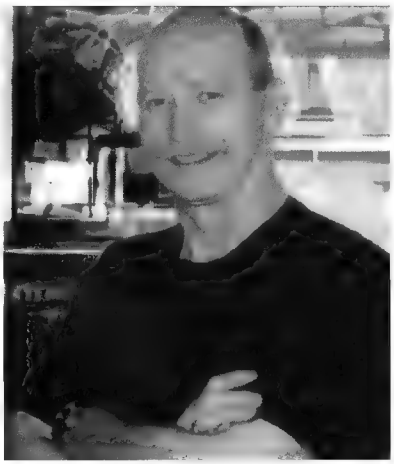
*Still, this highly accomplished but ever-pragmatic painter and illustrator had no illusions about conquering the comics world overnight. For the past few years he's been steadily increasing his presence in the industry, producing a series of stunning back covers for the Devil's Due* G.I. Joe *books published by Image, as well as the odd cover for Marvel, CrossGen, and—more recently—the newly announced magazine-size* Vampirella *relaunch. And it seems that this strategy has been more than a little effective, as he's got a growing list of comic companies banging on his door looking for their own piece of DMB heaven to showcase in their next issue or pin up gallery.*

*Knowing all that, it then should come as no surprise that Beck's influences are as wide-ranging, eclectic and interesting as his own work proves to be, encompassing styles as diverse as ancient art and abstract modernism, the great masters of old as well as some of comics ace illustrators and young turks.*

**Comic Book Marketplace**: Who were some of the artists that caught your eye and fired your imagination early on in your career?

**David Michael Beck**: My earliest influences were newspaper comic strips, and Disney animation. Behind that I would acknowledge Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Maxfield Parrish, Frazetta. And Neal Adams.

**CBM**: That's quite a heady list! What was it about their work that you found involving and exciting, and in what ways did they inspire you?



**Beck**: The artists I mentioned were all superior draftsmen. They were equally gifted in their understanding and perceptions of composition and color. Their work generated great emotion, mood, and drama. I tried to emulate these qualities in my work.

**CBM**: How about folks you discovered later? What particular artists—both in and outside of comics and fantasy illustration—captured your attention and interest?

*[continued on page 80]*

by Michael Naiman

# Watch Them Jump

Spring is in the air, it's time for the West Coast to awaken from winter and get ready for Wonder-Con and Wizard World Los Angeles (actually Long Beach). Both shows are worth a one-day visit from SoCal. Wonder-Con, with one year under its belt at Moscone Center, should be bigger this year now that the experience of a new venue has been worked out. The 100-mile drive to Wizard World LA is worth an up-and-back-afternoon.

**Quinten Clem**, long time Harvey collector and expert, reports "The early Richie books are picking up steam again. A few months ago I mentioned that *Hot Stuff the Little Devil* was very much in demand but that seems to have peaked. *Little Lotta* books in higher grade seem to be selling for good prices as of late. **Recent sales** include: *Little Dot* # 1 GD+ $511, #3 VG $61; *Harvey Hits* #1 CGC 6.5 $200, #13 FN $45; *Richie Rich Dollars & Cents* #1 FN- $152; *Richie Rich PLRB* #1 FN $1000, #11 NM $150, #24 FN+ $50; *Richie Rich Millions* #16 FN- $40; *Little Lotta* #23 VG $39, #77 FN+ $21; *Playful Little Audrey* #1 (2nd series) FN+ $72; *Hot Stuff the Little Devil* #60 FN- $22.

*Spider-Man* is still the lingua franca of comicdom. Recent sales include #1 GD $870, #1 GD $930, #1 VG/FN $1675, #2 VF $711, #3 GD $412, #3 VG $710, #4 VG/FN $450, #4 VG/FN $405, #5 VF- $510."

I've always thought that *Uncle Scrooge* #179 was rare, but I now believe that I must bump up my estimate of existing copies from 25 to more like the 50 range—all-in-all, still a very small amount for a comic 34 years old. A recent sale fetched $885 for a CGG 9.2 NM-. Also in the Disney arena a rare countertop standee issued to promote the 1936 Grosset & Dunlap first Donald Duck hardcover book sold for $18,243. According to the latest *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, the hardcover book itself (with dustcover) if found in NM condition would be worth $4500!

Last Sunday, I settled in to watch *The Simpsons* and whatever followed. I became attached to one of Fox's new shows, *Oliver Beene*. In the same vein as *Wonder Years* and *Brooklyn Bridge*, *Oliver* revolves around 11-year-old Oliver Beene during the early '60s. The series stars Grant Rosenmeyer as Oliver, with an eccentric family and friends. It's set against the backdrop of Rego Park, Queens, and narrated by wry adult Oliver (David Cross). This particular episode was entitled "X-Ray Specs" and opened with Oliver reading a comic book entitled *The Atomics* with a similar cover font and layout as the early *Fantastic Four* issues. He discovers Astounding Novelties' full-page ad for the weird and fantastic toys that we all remember. Oliver mails away for the glasses and finds out the hard truth about the scam that surrounds the ad.

But who didn't want one of these mail-away wonders? And whatever happened to all of the back stock? I've seen the camera, the toy soldiers, the fake dog doo; but where are the rest of these gems? Never seen them at a Hakes auction, Sotheby's, Heritage or Christies. Where did they all go? Why doesn't anyone have a collection of these at a show? And what company was behind this promotion?

**The Johnson Smith Company** has been supplying the essentially useless and the useless essential far longer than anyone reading this has been alive. Their many items included fake vomit, whoopee cushions, trick gum, and a healthy dose of shrunken heads. If you've *ever* ordered that stuff from a comic book, there's a good chance you sent one of your mother's checks to Johnson Smith.

In my youth, hours were spent wading through their list of goodies, followed by even more hours of waiting by the mailbox for my package of crap to arrive. I was obsessed with the whole process. I had a system to make sure packages were *always* on the way—as soon as one arrived, I'd place another order.

**X-Ray Specs** were certainly one of Johnson Smith's most popular items. Who wouldn't shell out a buck fifty to see a woman's figure through tight polyester? Notice how the ad "skirts" around the truth—the glasses did absolutely nothing aside from making it incredibly hard to see. Oh, wait, they did one other thing—made everyone who wore 'em look like a complete and total dope. Not only couldn't I see bones through skin, but I had to look like a moron while finding that out.

The **Air Car** hovercraft toy was pricier than most, but it was also one of the best. I admit it sounded a lot cooler in the ad than it actually was in-person—a battery-operated toy ship that bounced off air to create the illusion of flight, greatly hampered by the fact that it rarely lifted even half a centimeter off the ground, instead relying on the idea that you'll swear it's flying because *the ad said it flew.*

The **Vibrating Shocker**, or *Joybuzzer*, is as iconic as it gets when it comes to Johnson Smith. I've had several of these over the years, though none ever really worked too well. I'd always imagined the joybuzzer to be capable of literally *shocking* whomever I shook hands with. In reality, the buzzer would either shake violently for three seconds or do absolutely nothing at all.

Here's one of my favorites—the **Secret Book Safe**. You've seen these over the years—books with a big hole carved into the pages, allowing you to hide your valuables. Unfortunately, Johnson Smith's version was a 5" hard plastic book that looked nothing like a real book, defeating the purpose. The "safe" itself was made of the thinnest sheet of plastic you'll ever find, you could crack right through it by applying any level of pressure. As a final slap in the face, the fake book was titled "Book" on the front cover and side panel.

So the next time you inspect the ads in the back of comic books, remember these very important definitions. 1. Item is called "lifelike": Looks absolutely nothing like the real thing. 2. Item said to have "magic powers": Item has no magic powers. 3. Item has features that "really work": They really don't. 4. Item is "almost a foot tall": Item is between 3-9 inches. 5. Item is in "limited quantity": 450,000 or less. 6. Item is "amazing": Amazing is a relative term.

Until next time, keep watching your mailbox for that next delivery!

# CBM Market Watch

## A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

**Adventure**
#300 FN+ $162 1.5X

**Adv. of Bob Hope**
#1 FN- $158 29%

**Adv. into the Unknown**
#32 FN $49 86%

**Amazing Spider-Man**
#23 VG $63 73%
#36 FN $60 91%
#38 FN $60 91%
#50 VF+ $400 1.16X
#50 FN $135 1.04X
#51 FN $54 90%
#54 VF $66 94%
#57 VF $80 1.14X
#59 VF $85 1.21X
#60 FN+ $44 1.46X
#62 VF $50 88%
#64 VF $59 1.03X

**Batman**
#19 VF $612 51%
#181 FN $54 1.05X

**Archie's Girls Betty & Veronica Ann.**
#2 VG+ $66 83%
#3 VG $93 1.33X

**Captain America**
#100 VF $76 27%
#101 FN+ $29 1.2X
#109 VF $11 20%

**Christmas Parade**
#1 NM $1770 1.77X

**Comic Cavalcade**
#22 FN+ $273 1.07X

**Conan**
#15 VF+ $30 88%

**Detective**
#407 VF+ $35 1.02X

**Donald Duck**
#26 GD $25 96%

**Fantastic Four**
#3 VG $375 94%
#131 NM $15 83%

**Gene Autry**
#3 NM $204 82%
#4 NM $204 82%
#5 NM $163 65%

**Heroic**
#29 VF $50 54%

**Hulk**
#5 VG $226 98%
#182 FN $24 89%

**Iron Man Special**
#1 VF+ $26 1.08X

**Journey Into Mystery**
#103 VG $25 1.29X
#112 VG- $50 Guide

**Jungle**
#102 FN+ $59 1.04X
#108 FN $51 89%
#124 FN $46 85%

**Justice League of America**
#80 VF $20 87%
#94 VF $58 Guide

**Lash LaRue**
#1 FN $200 62%

**Lassie**
#60 VF- $10 50%

**Laugh**
#70 VF- $16 33%

**Little Dot Dotland**
#24 VF/NM $10 59%

**Machine Man**
#1 NM $9 59%

**Magilla Gorilla**
#1(file) VF/NM $69 49%

**Marge's Little Lulu**
#4 NM $281 75%
#5 NM $200 53%
#6 NM $418 1.44X
#7 NM $468 1.61X
#10 NM $318 1.09X
#12 NM $382 1.53X
#15 NM $382 1.53X
#17 NM $349 1.40X
#18 NM $340 1.36X
#20 NM $380 1.52X

**Marvel Mystery**
#36 GD- $200 1.24X
#69 FN+ $500 1.54X

**Marvel Spotlight**
#5 VG- $40 1.54X

**Marvel Super Action**
#1 NM $7 58%

**Metamorpho**
#1 VF $50 56%

**Micronauts**
#1 NM $4 90%
#1 NM+ $6 1.3X

**Midnight Mystery**
#4 VF/NM $21 43%

**Moon Knight**
#1 NM $4 85%

**Ms. Marvel**
#1 NM $4 35%

**Mush Mouse and Punkin Puss**
#1(file) NM- $87 70%

**Nova**
#1 NM- $4 31%

**Pep**
#56 VG+ $66 1.22X
#64 VG $38 79%
#65 GD $34 1.41X
#100 VG $22 79%

**Peter Pan Treasure Chest**
#nn (file) VF $375 49%

**Piracy**
#2 FN $48 67%
#3 VF $90 Guide
#4 FN $36 Guide

**Pixie & Dixie**
#1 (file) NM- $36 42%

**Ragman**
#1 NM- $4 1.5X

**Rawhide Kid**
#18 NM- $175 1.06X
#22 NM- $199 95%
#34 VF/NM $91 93%

**Red Sonja**
#1 NM- $3 25%

**Richie Rich Inventions**
#1 VF/NM $18 1.54X

**Shadow (Street & Smith)**
#1 VG- $800 90%
#3 GD+ $205 1.58X

**Shield Wizard**
#7 FN+ $183 52%

**Snaggle Puss**
#3 NM- $34 40%
#3 VF $29 34%

**Spider-Woman**
#1 NM+ $5 33%

**Startling**
#28 VG- $78 81%
#29 VG+ $65 68%
#44 GD $49 75%

**Superman**
#29 VG+ $240 Guide
#38 FN+ $377 1.26X
#132 FN- $57 79%

**Tales of Suspense**
#40 VF- $410 44%
#60 VF- $37 40%

**Tales to Astonish**
#30(White Mtn) NM $456 1.82X
#39 VG $64.5 87%
#41 VG- $49.5 67%
#55 GD+ $23 2.3X
#56 VG $18 90%
#58 VG $20 Guide
#83 GD+ $20 4X

**Terry and the Pirates (Harvey)**
#22 NM $43 50%
#24 NM $43 50%

**Tomb of Terror**
#16 VF $94 53%

**Top Cat**
#1(file) NM $82 39%

**Turok**
#6 VF/NM $28 19%
#7 NM $49 25%
#8 NM- $76 39%
#19 VF/NM $16 15%

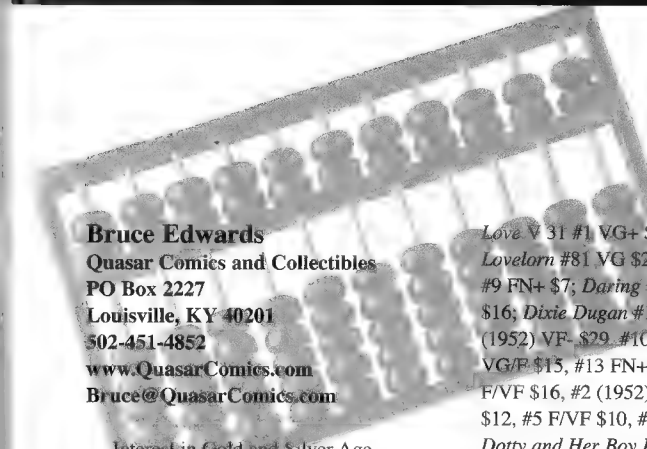
**Vacation Parade**
#1 NM $2095 1.4X

**WDCS**
#26 GD $70 1.52X
#40 VG $202 2.2X
#47 FN+ $145 1.31X
#52 FN+ $62 83%
#52 VG $68 1.36X
#59 GD $17 68%
#60 VG $26 52%
#61 VG $30 68%
#63 VG $60 1.36X
#74 VG $15 47%
#111 VG $30 1.66X
#112 FN+ $20 74%
#113 FN+ $13 72%
#114 VG $21 1.17X

**Wendy the Good Little Witch**
#39 VF $10 52%
#40 VF+ $8 40%
#47 NM- $8 27%

**Wilbur**
#22 FN+ $15 50%
#23 VF $38 68%
#27 VF $42 75%
#29 VF $36 64%

**X-Men**
#39 VF $60 88%
#44 VF $58 95%
#52 FN+ $25 1.19X
#64 VF $70 1.14X
#94 FN $174 Guide
#110 NM- $65 93%
#115 NM $44 68%
#116 NM $29 45%
#121 NM $48 51%
#134 NM $23 51%
#136 NM $27 68%
#142 NM $20 44%



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Interest in Gold and Silver Age esoteric books on eBay continues to be strong as long as the books are for sale instead of essentially for show with a high starting bid or high reserve. Prices realized on eBay are all over the board from dirt cheap compared to *Guide* to above *Guide*. I have included example sales from both ends of the spectrum.

We continue to receive above-average numbers of requests for various Timely teen and Matt Baker books. Charlton romance comics have a reasonable following. These books are extremely cheap, have excellent art and stories, and make for a change of pace from super-hero fare.

In newer material, the Graphitti edition *Watchmen* deluxe hard cover is in strong demand and receives a lot of interest on eBay.

Here are some recent eBay prices realized: *Adventures in Electronics* (1955) Promo Giveaway VF $3; *Adventures in Jet Power* (1955) Promo Giveaway VF $3; *Adventures of the Fly* #1 reading copy color Xerox cover $31; *Alexander the Great* Four Color VG $8; *All Romances* #4 GD+ $2; *Authentic Police Cases* #18 VG $37, #20 VG/F $17, #26 VF- $38, #29 VG+ $29, #30 VG+ $12, #32 VG+ $31, #34 VG/F $21; *Blazing West* #20 GD+ $2; *Blue Bolt* V7 #7 FA+ $4; *Boris Karloff* #10 F/VF $2, #11 VG/F $3, #12 F/VF $3, #6 FN- $3, #8 FN- $3, #9 FN+ $3; *Boy Meets Girl* #16 VG $2; *Brides Romances* #18 VG/F $8; *Candy* #1 VG+ $13, #17 F/GD $2, #2 G/VG $12, #27 GD $2, #5 VG- $10, #59 GD $2, #7 VG- $10, #9 VG/F $10; *Club 16* #1 FA $12; *Complete Love* V 31 #1 VG+ $2; *Confessions of the Lovelorn* #81 VG $2; *Cookie* #10 FN+ $7, #9 FN+ $7; *Daring Confessions* #6 FA $16; *Dixie Dugan* #1 (1942) FN- $43, #1 (1952) VF- $29, #10 VF/NM $11, #12 VG/F $15, #13 FN+ $15, #2 (1942-scarce) F/VF $16, #2 (1952) VF- $10, #3 VG/F $12, #5 F/VF $10, #7 FN $10, #9 VF $10; *Dotty and Her Boy Friends* #38 VG $10; *Ernie Comics* #1 VF- $40; *Exciting Romances* #6 VG $7; *Film Stars Romances* #3 VG/F $32; *First Love* #2 VG- $12, #3 VG/F $14, #7 VF/NM $19; *Flat-Top* #1 VG+ $16; *Forbidden Love* #4 GD $54; *Freckles and His Friends* #10 VG $13, #9 VG+ $15; *Glamorous Romances* #42 F/GD $2, #50 VG $3, #85 VG/F $2; *Great Lover Romances* #7 G/VG $4; *Hap Hazard* #17 VG $8, #8 VG $12; *Haunted Love* #1 VG/F $8; *Hedy De Vine* #32 VG $17, #33 VG/F $29, #37 VF- $75, #38 NM- $80, #40 VG $30, #41 FA $8, #44 VG $13, #48 App FN $12; *I Love You* #17 VF- $9; *Ideal Love and Romance* #5 VG $37; *Intimate Confessions* #6 VG+ $24; *Jeanie Comics* #15 F/GD $20; *Junie Prom Comics* #6 VG $18; *Junior Miss* #24 VG $35, #27 VG- $20, #30 GD $17, #32 VG/F $13, #33 VG $10, #34 GD+ $10, #36 F/VF $16; *Just Married* #45 VF $5, #5 VF $20; *Kathy* #12 G/VG $14; *Kathy the Teen-Age Tornado* #5 VG/F $20; *The Kilroys* #1 VG/F $10; *Love & Romance* #1 (1971) VG+ $4; *Love Diary* #78 VF+ $4; *Love Letters* #1 FN- $16, #25 VG $9, #37 VG/F $9, #4 VG/F $31; *Love Romances* #14 FN $20, #15 FN+ $20, #16 VG- $8, #25 VG $10; *Love Tales* #42 VG/F $13, #44 F/VF $12; *Mazie* #11 VG+ $6; *Meet Merton* #4 VG $12; *My Love* #29 FN- $2; *My Own Romance* #21 VG $20, #32 VG- $5, #42 VG $20; *My Romance* #3 VG/F $11; *My Secret Life* lot of #31 VG and #44 GD $4; *Ozzie & Babs* #9 VG $20; *Peter Cannon Thunderbolt* #55 VF+ $5; *Pictorial Romances* #12 FN $73, #13 VG $40, #16 VF/NM $140; *Popular Teenagers* #18 F/GD $5, #16 VG+ $13; *Romantic Adventures* #25 VG $4; *Romantic Confessions* #2 VG $5; *Romantic Picture Novelettes* #1 FN+ $43; *Romantic Secrets* #21 VG $4, #38 G/VG $10; *School Day Romances* #4 G/VG $24; *Secrets of Love & Marriage* #8 VG $2; *Soap Opera Love* #2 VF $2; *Strange* #2 FA+ $4; *Sue & Sally Smith Flying Nurses* #52 FN $8; *Teen-Age Romances* #28 F/VF $12; *Tippy's Friends Go-Go and Animal* #3 VF $2; *Top Love Stories* #17 PR $5; *True to Life Romances* #11 FN $60, #13 FN- $33, #3 FN+ $46, #5 FN- $10, #8 VG+ $10, #9 GD- $10; *War Heroes* #8 VG+ $10; *Wartime Romances* #6 FN+ $75; *Wonders of Aladdin* (1961) Movie Comic VF $10; *Zoo Funnies* #2 G/VG $5.

That is all for this time. Keep up the hunt and happy collecting!

**Jamie Newbold**
**Southern California Comics**
**8280 Clairemont Mesa Blvd. #124**
**San Diego, CA 92111**
**858-715-8669**
**www.socalcomics.com**

Christmas is gone and business has returned to the post-holiday patterns. New customers for new and back-issue comics continue to pop up. The influx of new customers and the compilation of Christmas sales gives our store a good measure of the average age/sex of comic book consumers. First of all I can see that no new trends have arisen. The majority of comic book buyers (different from store customers) are still white males 21 to 41 years of age. Few children buy comics from us, if at all. I break the buying habits down into two categories: New or relatively new comics for the current crop of readers, and Gold, Silver and Bronze Age back-issue customers.

There is a larger percentage of buyers who concentrate on weekly new comics, say about 200 customers will hit our store

for any given monthly title. Seeing the same faces regularly we become familiar with their choices. Given the expense of buying back issues we understand that many would like to make older comic buys, but it does not fit their budget. I filter out the ones who buy older comics and we settle on about 5% of our monthly comics customers that buy older back issues.

In any given week we have those 5-10 customers that buy any quantity of back issues that pre-date the 1980s. Those issues are graded and priced according to *Guide,* with some exceptions. Infrequent customers shopping for back issues pop up several times every month (this includes our website). Those purchases often account for large volumes of sales based upon discounts we offer or shopper's indulgence in a large quantity of older comics they may not see for a while.

For the percentage of sales of new comics vs. back issues we see an overall ratio split almost even. Store sales are equal measure new comics and back issues. 50% of our sales are to new comics buyers (this includes trade pubs) with only a small percentage of those people buying back issues. The people buying new comics do so with such regularity that we can project ahead and predict sales. Those projections allow me to budget my bill payments in advance so I can figure out how much money I can continue to set aside for interesting back-issue collections that might come a-calling.

The other 50% of our sales are made to those back issue buyers. These buyers at our store are generally in their mid-20s and up, mostly males, and have developed disposable income sometime after college, military duty or a few years of marriage. The prices are steeper for older back issues compared to new comics. So it takes the sale of fewer books to equal the dollar figures from new comics. The profit derived from new comics averages around half of cover (our Diamond discount is greater but shipping eats away at that percentage). Profit is often greater on back issues. The markup can be anywhere from 50-90% profit depending on the terms when any back issue was purchased from the previous owner. Those sales are unpredictable and cannot be projected forward with any degree of certainty.

The challenge in my business is to get the two categories of buyers to crossover.

I don't see many of our Gold and Silver Age back issue buyers perusing the new comic racks. I've attempted to encourage the crossover on many occasions with little success. The older buyers prefer the old done-in-one style of comic production and don't like continued story arcs that dominate today's comics. They like the familiarity of artist/writer names of the past and feel lost or disconnected with much of today's talent.

As I mentioned earlier, few children buy comics from us, a fact noted at other stores. Those children would mean a lot of future business if they rose up the buying ranks like the current crop of customers. I find that the chance of a next generation of comic book buyers looks slim. In fact, I place more emphasis on exposing new comics to my back-issue customers than I do selling comics to children.

We compete with other forms of marketing by doing such things as reducing low-grade back issues down to half *Guide* or less to our store customers. This encourages modern comic book buyers to pick up older comics and begin the exploration of *their* Golden Age–the late '60s-late '70s. I've had more success with those crossovers and have seen that trend grow. Having the product available at the store level is uncommon. Having a wide selection for hands-on examination gives us appreciable competition to on-line auctions where risk and mystery can accompany the bids.

**Golden Age**: *Fighting Yank* #5 GD $78.

**Silver Age**: *Amazing Spider-Man* #2 FN- $750, #90 VF/NM $85, #97 VF $95, #101 F/VF $78; *Defenders* #5 NM- $30; *Fantastic Four* #76 NM $70, #88 NM- $50; *Silver Surfer* #2 FN+ $75, #7 F/VF $50, #15 VF $45; *Witzend* #10 NM $50; *Wonder Woman* #200 CGC 8.5 $75.

**Bronze Age**: *Amazing Spider-Man* #129 F/VF $200; *Detective Comics* #431 NM $16; *Incredible Hulk* #181 CGC 5.0 $200, #181 CGC 3.5 $150; *Iron Fist* #14 F/VF $65; *Wolverine* (Limited Series) #2 CGC 8.5 $35; *Uncanny X-Men* #94 F/VF $265, #101 VF/NM $105.

## Ted Van Liew

**Superworld / Vanliew@aol.com**

It's been a hoppin' new year for comical books! There is always a bit of a slowdown (I call it the black hole) during the holiday season, which is a bit of a nuisance. But by mid January, all the diehard collectors and investors are going through withdrawal and sales pick up again.

This year so far we've experienced a boom greater than we anticipated. A lot of collectors are coming back, and at shows we're seeing faces not seen in years. And lovin' it!

Leading the way are the Marvel and DC #1 and early number issues. Can't keep any in stock. At the Big Apple Con in January, we sold *DD* #1, *Sgt. Fury* #1, *Avengers* #1, several early *Spideys*, *FFs* and others in mid to lower grades. We would have sold any others that we had. We didn't have any high grade #1s available but had a few requests for those, especially *JIM* #83, *FF* #1, *AF* #15, *X-Men* #1 and *Avengers* #1.

I think we'd get a lot of interest in DC #1s in high grade too, but they're just not out there. People just don't know how very much scarcer the DCs are than the Marvels!

As has been the trend for some time, high grade Silver is a huge part of our regular business. Everybody wants the blue chips. High grades fly outta here at a very rapid clip. Everything else sells at a more normal steady pace.

So there are really two markets. The high grade, super fast-paced market, and the regular, steady market in average Silver Age, Golden and Bronze. The super-hero themed movies comin' outta Hollywood hasn't hurt either! Any books that feature characters involved in a movie become burning hot, especially first

*[continued on page 75]*

# Passion in Action

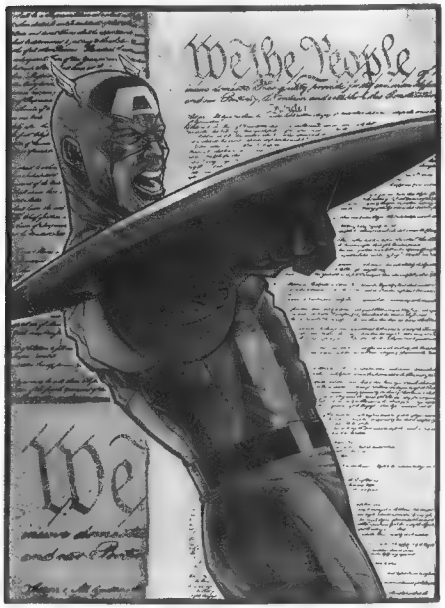
## The Life and Art of John K. Snyder III

**interview conducted by Bill Baker**

*Ever since he entered the field in the mid-eighties, assisting Tim Truman on that worthy's seminal eco-disaster action-adventure series,* Scout, *John K. Snyder III has displayed a talent for creating not just exciting visual sequences, but also nuanced character expressions and body language. This uncanny ability to capture both the essence of movement and emotional content in still images has served Snyder well from his earliest efforts, starting with* Fashion in Action *[a creator owned property which began life as a series of backups in the aforementioned* Scout *before seeing life as a pair of one shots], continuing through the pulpish noir of Eclipse's* Prowler *miniseries, illustrating an arc of Matt Wagner's* Grendel, *to his tenure on DC's* Suicide Squad *and the* T:2 *movie-on-the-page comic sequel,* Terminator: Present War: Cybernetic Dawn, *released by Marvel in '96.*

*Along the way, Snyder began painting and started accepting work outside of the comics industry. But still his first love, comics, kept calling him back, resulting in a series of very successful painted cards, posters, covers [including a series of popular covers for the venerable* Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide *which recreated landmark comic book covers] and adaptations for a revived* Classics Illustrated *line. More recently, Snyder's lent his brushes to two DC projects, creating* Green Lantern: Brightest Day, Blackest Night *and, with Matt Wagner, reinventing Doctor Mid-Nite for a new millennium.*

*Today, he's widely recognized as a truly gifted penciller, inker and painter; an artist who is wholly capable of rendering the quietest scene or wildest action sequence with equal aplomb in black and white or glorious full color.*




Captain America trading card art.

*One thing that's remained constant throughout Snyder's long and varied artistic journey, however, is his firm commitment to creating truly memorable images which convey not only a rich sense of movement and emotional meaning—but which, above all, serve the story.*

**Bill Baker**: How did you discover comics, and at what age?

**John K. Snyder III**: Oh, gosh, I've been reading and looking at comics since I can remember. When I was younger, my father and his younger brothers enjoyed comics and I would get a chance to look at their copies, so I was introduced to all of the old Marvel and DC comics through them. And they had quite a collection, so I was able to spend a lot of time at a very early age looking at them. Also, I loved comic strips in newspapers. I just instantly hooked on to it, and loved them. So it was very fortunate that I grew up in a family who were already reading them at the time.

**Baker**: So you grew up with comics and strips being seen as just another type of literature, then.

**Snyder**: Oh, yeah. I hate to say "back then," but back then it was still a major form of entertainment for kids and younger people. It was around the time that the Silver Age had started kicking in, and they held on to their comics. Not necessarily for collecting reasons—people weren't doing that at the time—but I was reading the first issues of *Fantastic Four* and *Spider-Man*. They were a few years old at that point, but they had kept them around. So I was definitely getting in at the ground level. It was great.

**Baker**: What about those comics appealed to you?

**Snyder**: I just *loved* them! I was a huge fan of *Batman*. The television show was on—though I barely remember it at this point, I was very young—and I enjoyed the Marvel comics because they were so unusual. The characters were monster-oriented. The Fantastic Four and Spider-Man were odd compared to somebody like Superman, or Aquaman. And they were usually fighting monsters, and the villains—in the case of Spider-Man—were almost Chester Gould-*Dick Tracy*esque villains—the Lizard, Doctor Octopus and the Vulture. And the Fantastic Four were fighting Doctor Doom, and Mole Man. [Laughter] So it almost had this post-'50s, B movie quality to it, and I enjoyed those movies when they would show them on Saturday afternoons. There was a correlation between this Atomic Age monster movie stuff, and it was in the comics, too, and that appealed to me.

**Baker**: Did getting into comics at that early of an age have much impact on your career choices?

**Snyder**: My Aunt Kathy tells me I was holding a pencil before I could walk. [General laughter] I don't really think I had much choice in the matter. Drawing came very naturally to me, and it's

something I enjoyed doing. I can remember drawing my own comic book stories on notebook paper. By the time I was in second or third grade, I was already trying to do stories, and I'd make up my own characters.

It was a natural progression for me. I never thought of doing anything else. Though as I got older, when I was a teenager, I was fascinated with the idea of getting involved in movies. There's a direct correlation between movies and comics, as far as storytelling goes. But with comics, you had an unlimited budget. You can draw anything, where, with a movie, you'd actually have to create all this stuff. You don't have to direct people—you can draw them. [General laughter] It's non-confrontational. Though I must say, in the long run, it does take longer to draw the stuff than to film it! [More general laughter]

Anyway, I can't imagine doing anything else. Of course I love illustration, and movies, and graphic work. But I keep coming back to doing comics.

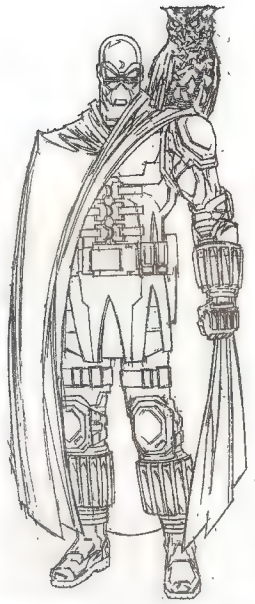
**Baker**: Do you think it's the sheer joy and freedom you experience as a storyteller and a visual artist when creating comics that's at the heart of that impulse to keep coming back to the medium?

**Snyder**: Oh, absolutely. I think one thing that's really satisfying…It's great to do an illustration. That comes with a certain level of satisfaction. But when you're telling a story—whether you're writing it yourself, or working with a writer, whatever the collaboration is between writer, inker, colorist—the fact you're telling a story that will communicate something to other people, yeah, there's a real thrill there because you're not only leaving them with an image, you're leaving them an actual story that they can remember. I definitely get a thrill out of the storytelling aspect of it. It's a big part of what doing a comic is all about.

**Baker**: Did that aspect of the craft come naturally to you, like drawing did, or is that something that you've had to work at a bit?

**Snyder**: When I was a kid doing the stories, I found people would remark that I'd managed to make the characters look the same in each picture, and I didn't quite understand what they meant by that. But looking back on it now, that's something that people *do* have difficulty with—drawing the same character, and making the character look the same page after page after page. But that just came really naturally to me. And the storytelling aspect of it, as well.

It's almost like establishing another language, in a way. It's a visual form of communication, and like any language, you have to learn it. Aspects of it come naturally, but a lot of it you learn *while* you're doing it. You learn from other people you work with, and looking at other's work, and getting ideas on how to create a setting, and pace. But, yeah, in some respects it does come naturally; but it's also something where you grow in ability to communicate as you go along, if that makes sense.



Pencil study for new Doctor Mid-Nite costume, designed and illustrated by John K. Snyder III (**Doctor Mid-Nite**, Book Three, DC Comics).

**Baker**: You've just mentioned a few particular important devices, such as pace and setting. Do any of those aspects take precedence for you when approaching the page?

**Snyder**: One of my favorite parts of doing a comic book is the initial thumbnail period. That's where you have the script in front of you, and you break down the action in little postage stamp or a little bit larger sized drawings. It's basically stick figures with balloon heads, where you're trying to figure out where everything is, and what direction it's going. That's a lot of the fun of it, really, trying to set the pace, the highs and the lows of the story. You try to find the point of focus on each page; what can draw the reader from the last panel of the last page to the next page. If the page is on the right hand side, that last panel before you turn the page, and it's a surprise, or a sudden turn in the story. All that is important.

It's like beats in music. It's your highs and lows. Building tension, and the actual development of a situation. And once you get that set up, the framework of your layout and what's going on on the page, that's when you go in and start doing all the rendering. You can't have a good page or a good series of pages without that initial pacing. Otherwise, you just end up with a collection of illustrations, as opposed to something with some kind of flow. [Laughter]

**Baker**: Is the pacing for you dictated or found within the script you're given, or is this something that you can impose on the script?

**Snyder**: It depends. Yeah, I think the writer designates the direction of the story and then, visually, you can add in little things. The script dictates that aspect of it. I'm trying to think of a good example of this… If you've got someone going down an alleyway, and then you turn the page and somebody suddenly jumps him, unless it's specified in a plot script, as opposed to a panel-by-panel script, as the artist that gives you the chance [to play with it]. Maybe you could have a series of small panels—a close up of a foot, a drip of water coming off the end of a fire escape, a piece of trash blowing across an alley, that sort of thing, a shadow against the

Finished art for first appearance of new Doctor Mid-Nite costume (**Doctor Mid-Nite**, Book Three, DC Comics).

wall. And then when you turn the page you can have a very large panel of somebody springing out from nowhere.

When I was doing the *Classics Illustrated* adaptation of *The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad—which is not an action story at all; it's more of a talking [comic], it's talking, it's people interacting, it's more of an intrigue story rather than a big action story with lots of explosions and fighting and all of that sort of thing—then you take a different tack with that. So, for example, with a story like that you put the emphasis on the characters. So you can have a shot of a character very large, with inset panels of them moving throughout the city. And then, when you do an action sequence, or you're doing a science fiction story, or a super-hero-based story or anything along those lines, the action is taking over at that point. So that has a completely different pace.

**Baker**: Are there any primary influences on your approach to telling stories visually?

**Snyder**: Well, my gosh, I've ingested so many forms of media. Reading books, short stories, comics, comic strips. Movies, television. I mean, I try to take in as much as I can.

For example, I *love* a lot of John Frankenheimer's movies, the fellow who directed *The Manchurian Candidate* and *The Train*. I like his pacing and his action sequences. Will Eisner's *Spirit*; the way he handled mood, and the way he broke down his panels. Which I think you saw a little bit on Frank Miller's end when he initially did *Daredevil*. I love the way that was paced, and the way that was handled. I love the writing of David Mamet, his scriptwriting for both the screen and the stage, and the way he handles characters, and the way he handles sequences.

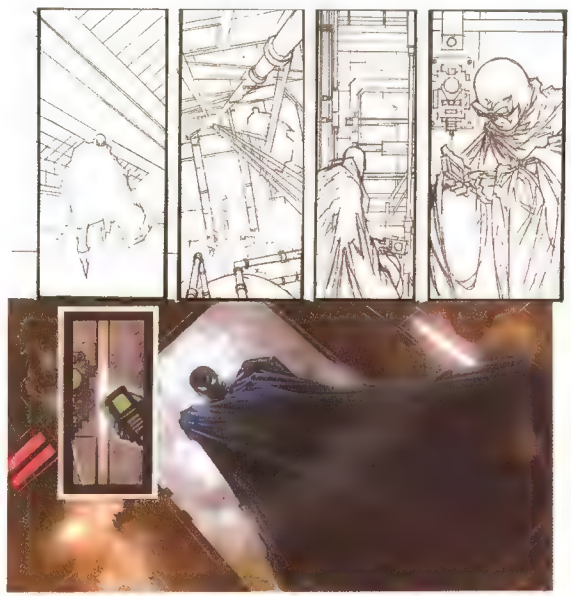
I tend to enjoy movie directors and how they handle situations, setting, mood and pacing just as much as I enjoy comic artists and writers. I get a cross section of influence I like to think.

**Baker**: Now, as far as the basic skills used in drawing and creating art, was that something you just seemed to know instinctively, or did you attend classes to develop and hone your abilities?

**Snyder**: I was very fortunate that I had a lot of people in my family who were artistically inclined when I was growing up, so they were supportive. I went to a couple of different high schools, we moved around a bit, so I was lucky to have a couple of great high school art teachers who were serious about the art classes. And I was also very fortunate that there were some extremely talented people in my art class, so it was kind of competitive, and we learned a lot from each other. We took it pretty seriously, those of us who were into drawing. And I'd run into other people who liked drawing comics, too.

Then, when I went to college, I was lucky to have some great teachers. Specifically, I had a design teacher who got me into approaching comics [in a different way]. He didn't teach comics, but the sense of design he taught, it was three dimensional design, and I applied that a bit to how to structure a page. All that stuff came in handy and proved helpful.

I also worked at a graphics studio for about five years, and that helped me with actual production. We didn't do any illustration work—it was mostly charts



Pencil to painted page stages from **Doctor Mid-Nite**, Book Two, DC Comics.

**Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide** #31 cover art (**FF** #1).

and graphs—but we had tight deadlines. Something would come in in the afternoon and have to go out the same evening, and we learned a basic application of when a job comes in, moving a job right out.

And then, when I first got started in comics, I worked as an assistant to Tim Truman, and he taught me a ton of stuff about basic storytelling. How to convey things from one panel to the next, and establishing scenes.

I have to say that I learned a lot from just working in the field. I've been real lucky that I've worked with a lot of really, really talented people—some great writers, and other people inking, coloring, etc.—and you learn from the people you work with. It's not something I *don't* think you can necessarily do by yourself. So, yeah, some of it comes naturally, but I think a lot of it you learn actually *doing* it.

**Baker**: What were some of the things that Tim taught you that might have stuck in your mind?

**Snyder**: How to get from one panel to the next. If a character hands an envelope to somebody, where to place the hand, where to have the person going in the next panel. Little, simple things—when you cut from one sequence to the next, establishing shots, so that before you go inside the building where two people are having a conversation, you have the exterior shot of the building. You have a window where the two people are having the conversation, indicating where they are or what time of day it is. Really, simple, basic things that make the story seem more real, and make the people seem like they're in a real space, rather than figures in a box. [General laughter]

**Baker**: Are there any other important tips or tricks that you might have gleaned from other writers or artists that have proven invaluable in your work?

**Snyder**: Oh, gosh. Let the writers do the writing. Listen to the writer. [More general laughter]

The main thing is, if you are collaborating, to always remember that you *are* collaborating. That it's not an individual effort. That it *is* a team effort, and that your vision—if it isn't something that you're writing-penciling-inking-painting all by yourself—that you are working with another creative person; that your interpretation is important, but at the same time you have to try to work together to try to get the combined vision across. Because that's when it clicks, when the whole thing comes together. You can't go off in different directions.

Also, another thing is… One of the questions you had in the list you sent me that I thought was really great, which is "Are art and script equal partners, or does one matter more than the other in your view?" And I have to say that *absolutely* [they're equal]. As much as I'd love to think great art is all it takes, I honestly believe that a great story and crude art is a lot better than crude story and great art. It's vital for a comic to be successful. No matter how beautifully painted it is, or beautifully drawn it is, if the story isn't good and the characters aren't real, it's just good to look at. And I think this is a big problem in movies these days. I mean, you look at movies now—*technically* they're beyond brilliant. Movies are better looking now than they've ever been, both with [respect to] special effects and just general cinematography. But a lot of them come across, especially some of the bigger pictures, as extremely hollow. And that's because the story is just not there. And I think you can have the same problem in a comic. You can have just the most drop dead gorgeous, beautiful artwork you've ever seen, but if the story and the characters aren't there, then it's just a collection of pretty pictures.

We're in a period in this field where I see a lot of the emphasis going back towards the writers, and that's terrific. It's essential to retain readership, and for people to get their money's worth and be

**Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide** cover art (**Hulk** #1).

happy and excited about picking something up. Because, no matter how beautifully drawn it is, you've got to have a story, too. And when you've got a great story *and* great art, that's what the beauty of this business is; when you have got a product that shines all the way around.

**Baker**: I've always wondered if you preferred painting to penciling and inking?

**Snyder**: Both have their pluses and minuses. The great thing about working in black and white is that it goes a lot faster. [General laughter]

I think when you're doing a painted story, it's something special. I couldn't see painting a monthly book. Even if you *could* do it, I don't see the need for that. I think painted books in some way, at least for me personally, and the way that I do them, they're special projects. They're stand out one-shots, or almost like books, and a monthly comic is a series. Black and white art has a *suddenness* to it, an *immediacy* to it, and a painted book… It's a *nice* thing. Again, it's important that it has a good story, but I think that it's more of a *specialty* product. Both of them are great, though. There's a certain power to black and white you can't get with painting, and there's a certain power to painting you can't get with black and white, sometimes. But I'd have to say that I love them both. I find both of them very satisfying when they work.

**Baker**: How do you decide—in those instances where you're given a choice—what might work best as a painted book and what would be done best in black and white?

**Snyder**: Well, it's usually designated by the assignment. When I painted the *Dr. Midnight* or the *Green Lantern* project, or when I painted the Harlan Ellison story for the *Dream Corridor* series, those were set up to be, specifically, painted books, and the stories lent themselves to being painted. On the other hand, you've got an extreme example when I did the *Grendel: Black, White and Red* story. That's the nature of the format, and that was the way that was [designed] to be done.

When I'm going to paint something, it needs to be a real stand out, event kind of thing—because it is such an amazing amount of time and dedication that has to go into it. But that doesn't put down doing a black and white assignment *at all*. When you're going to get into a painted book, you're talking about taking on the role of penciler, inker *and* colorist, so you've got to be dedicated. Because, rather than being collaborative, as it might be in something involving black and white, that's something that's going to be all up to you—so you *better* make sure you love it! [General laughter] It's all up to you, once the script is written.

YOU ARE THE OTHER MAN, VERLOC. TWO MEN WERE SEEN ENTERING THE SHOP.
WELL, TAKE ME NOW. WHAT'S TO PREVENT YOU? YOU HAVE THE RIGHT.
OH NO! I KNOW TOO WELL WHO YOU HAVE BEEN. BRING YOURSELF AWAY TO HELL. I HAVE TO MANAGE THIS LITTLE AFFAIR ALL BY MYSELF BUT I CAN'T YOU MAKE A HISTORIC ITEM I AND FOLLOW YOU!
I HAVE BEEN MAD FOR A MONTH OR MORE. BUT I AM NOT ANARCHIST. IT'S ALL OVER. IT SHALL COME OUT AND TAKE THE SWEEPS STATES.
OH, YES. YOU HOPE THE OTHERS WILL GET AWAY IF WE FOLLOW YOU! DON'T YOU? NO, NO I HAVE BEEN A STRAIGHT WAY TO THOSE PEOPLE TOO LONG. AND NOW EVERYTHING MUST "COME OUT"
LET IT COME OUT, THEN PUT HER MARK NOW. HOW DID YOU GET AWAY?"
I WAS CLOSE ENOUGH TO SEE WHEN I HEARD THE BANG. I STOPPED RUNNING THEN. YOU I SAW NO CARE TILL I WAS FAST THE END OF HOUSE STATE.
BARBARA! WHAT'S THE MATTER? STUPID... YOU END?"
YOU I CAME TOO CLOSE.
HE BELIEVE NO STUPIDITY. I MUST TO AD OF ALONE
Page from adaptation of Joseph Conrad's **The Secret Agent** (**Classics Illustrated**, Berkley Books, First Publishing).

**Snyder**: It totally varies. Sometimes a cover can go much quicker than a page. A cover illustration is one image. You can paint a page where you've got a group of guys running down a hallway inside a giant secret lair, and down flights of stairs and getting into a helicopter and escaping off of the top of a building, and *that* can take a lot longer than a guy standing on top of a pile of bodies!

So, it varies. Again, if it's Godzilla knocking down a lot of buildings, that painting's going to take a while. [Laughter] But if it's a figure lost in a snowstorm, it's going to take a lot less time.

**Baker**: Well, this leads to the question of how important realism is to your painted work, and whether that's one of the primary things you're striving for in that medium?

**Snyder**: Oh, boy, that's another interesting question. Everybody's got a different way of handling color art. There are artists who have what I would say would almost be like a photographic style. And then you have art that's more…it's real, but it's a *comic* kind of real. It's still a comic book. There's a level of reality there, but at the same time there's exaggeration of the features,

© John K. Snyder III

Promotional piece for new **Fashion in Action** series, created by John K. Snyder III.

the musculature, the shading, and whatever.

To me, I often feel that if you get *too* real—and by that I mean too photographic in your rendering—it almost makes it less of a comic and more of an illustration. And sometimes this works, and then, sometimes, it's almost, "Gee, what would it look like if a guy were really in a super-hero costume?" It looks like stills from a movie, as opposed to being a comic book—which is it's own reality.

I like both. I don't think there should be only one style. I don't think you should just have photorealistic painted books. I don't think you should necessarily only have a real extreme, sort of exaggerated rendering either. I think you need to have a variety of styles. It's a real individual sort of thing to do, and one of the advantages, and what's *important* about painting a book, is that your style is *your* vision, and that's what makes it special. And that's what differentiates it from other books.

So, to me, the reality is in *your* conviction to make it real, if that makes any sense, as opposed to the actual rendering. It's how believable you make it with the storytelling, the settings, the script. One of the advantages of painting is that you *can* exaggerate. And you can exaggerate using color, and you can create some moods that you might not necessarily be able to create in black and white.

What works best for me is to combine all elements, to make things somewhat photo realistic *at times*, then switch to a graphic sort of effect. I like switching around. That's what makes painting a book exciting.

It's an individual expression, I guess is what I'm after.

**Baker**: So how do you create a painting, usually?

**Snyder**: Well, my process is that, after I get through the thumbnail stage and I've got my layout figured out, depending on what is on the page… I do a *lot* of reference. If I've got a New York cityscape, I'll research buildings and what sort of cars [I need to show], that sort of thing. Sometimes I'll have people pose, just to get a feel for lighting, or where the hand goes, the way it's holding an object. I don't necessarily try to work from the photo line for line; it's something to work off of in terms of shading, or folds in clothing. Something about having somebody pose, at least for me, gets kind of static. I don't know if you've ever noticed this before. Sometimes in painted stuff, there's a certain static-ness to it if it's too photo realistic. So you want to exaggerate, you want to build off of that.

I get past the thumb-nailing stage, and the research stage, and then I'll go about penciling the page. And normally I pencil it fairly tightly. Again, a framework I work off of, and then I'll put in my color on top of that using Liquitex acrylics, gouache, and Prismicolor pencils.

**Baker**: That's a pretty involved process. It sounds like it could take a few days to a week to complete one page working that way.

**Snyder**: It varies. Again, it depends on what's on the page. But I would say a good week painting would be two to three pages finished. That's a *great* week! [General laughter] And, again, this depends on the artist, too. A lot of artists work faster, and a lot of people don't.

**Baker**: Is there a certain type of paper that you prefer?

**Snyder**: Scott Hampton introduced me to Strathmore illustration board, and I've never worked on anything else since. It's usually a three- or four-ply, and what's great about it is that it's very workable. You can really beat up the paper. You can erase, you can take off paint, you can put it back on, you can etch away at something to correct it. It *really* takes a beating. It's thick enough that it doesn't warp, and it holds the color really well. I swear by it. It's just absolutely *the* only paper I'll work on in color.

**Baker**: Do you also use that paper for your black and white work?

**Snyder**: Actually, no. Usually the companies supply the boards for that, and they've developed some nice paper over the years. And that's regular smooth Bristol. And I find that, in that case, the Strathmore Bristol's too tough for me.

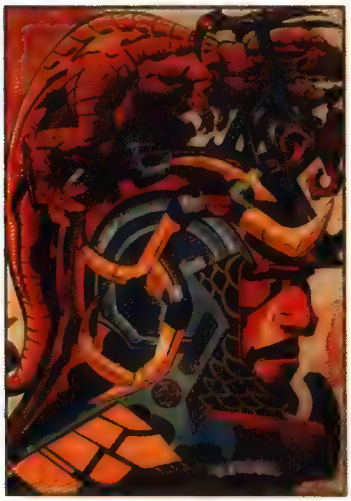
When it comes to pen and ink, it's nice to have a smooth surface to work on for brush and ink. I've gone through periods where I've roughed up my stuff in black and white, too—you know, etching and scratching. But I tend to go for a smoother line these days. So I'm much more comfortable with the smooth Bristol.

*[continued on page 58]*

# JACK KIRBY:

## KING OF THE FANTASY PAINTERS?

**BY S.C. RINGGENBERG**



This powerful helmeted visage is a perfect evocation of the ferocious intensity embodied in almost all of Kirby's fantasy warriors.

A simlar effect in **OMAC** #3 (Jan-Feb 1975), D. Bruce Berry inks.

Jack "King" Kirby is known to comics fans the world over as the greatest comic book artist of all time, the illustrator of a staggering 25,000 comics pages, and as the creator or co-creator of hundreds of characters, including Spider-Man; the Fantastic Four; The Hulk; The Mighty Thor; Kamandi, the Last Boy on Earth; The Boy Commandos; The Boy Explorers; Stuntman; The Fighting American; Iron Man; The New Gods; The Eternals; Mr. Miracle; The Demon; The Newsboy Legion; Bullseye; The Silver Surfer; The Inhumans; The Fly; Challengers of the Unknown and The X-Men, to name only a few. But as well known, even as revered as Kirby is, probably few of his fans know that he was also an excellent painter.

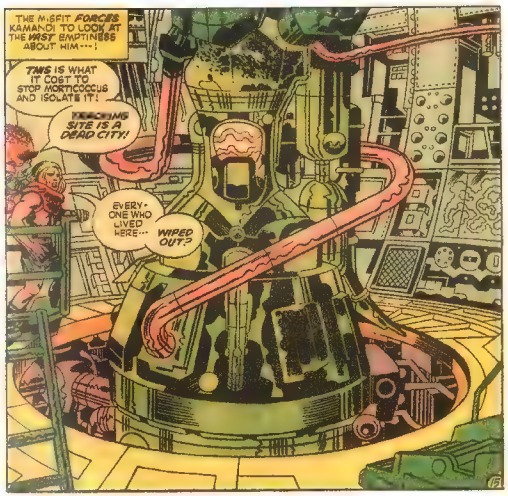
Kirby's work has been endlessly studied, debated and reprinted in numerous books, comics, reprint volumes, and, of course, the monthly *Kirby Collector* magazine. Oddly enough, however, relatively little attention has been paid to Kirby's paintings. Some of them were collected in the late '70s in the book *sorcerers*, which highlighted the work of a dozen or so fantasy artists besides Kirby, including Jim Steranko, Kenneth Smith and Michael Whelan. Unfortunately, the section on Kirby only reprinted five of his paintings and one pencil drawing without any accompanying titles, dates, or sizes on any of the artwork. The reproduction was decent and, at the time, it was a revelation to see Kirby's paintings published anywhere. Still, it was just enough of a taste to leave fans of Kirby's paintings wanting more. *The Kirby Collector* reprinted several of Kirby's paintings (in issue 19, recently collected in the latest *Kirby Collector* anthology) but little was said about the works that were reprinted. However, at least one of the paintings included in that article, a striking piece entitled "The Gods" has never been reprinted anywhere else, either in *sorcerers* or either of the Jack Kirby trading card sets that came out in the late '90s.

Galactic Head (1969) is one of Kirby's boldest designs as a painter. Here he achieves an almost abstract use of color and forms.

AT LAST--IT IS MINE! THE ULTIMATE WEAPON! THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF POWER!
THE ONLY SUCH ARTIFACT KNOWN TO MAN--WHICH CAN CONVERT THOUGHT WAVES--INTO MATERIAL ACTION!

Kirby used the power of the Cosmic Cube to stylize a panel featuring the Red Skull in **Tales to Astonish** #80 (Jun 1966), Don Heck inks.

Gigantic complicated machinery is one of the hallmarks of Kirby's comic book work. Here he renders a typically ornate, complex machine in watercolor. What is it? Only Kirby knows, but it sure is visually impressive. Below, machinery in **Kamandi** #9 (Sep 1973), Mike Royer inks.


THE MISFIT FORCES KAMANDI TO LOOK AT THE MOST EMPTINESS ABOUT HIM---!
THIS IS WHAT IT COST TO STOP MORTICOCUS AND ISOLATE IT!
THIS SITE IS A DEAD CITY!
EVERY-ONE WHO LIVED HERE---
WIPED OUT?

"The Gods" is an interesting stylistic departure for Kirby in that it's not done in his usual bravura painting style, which bore at least superficial similarities to his best comic book work. To my eye, the boldly colored image in "The Gods" bears a greater similarity to some of the striking graphics of Communist propaganda posters and banners of the late '20s and early '30s. This is not to imply that Kirby was a Commie, of course. Jack was a true-blue American patriot who fought in the Battle of the Bulge; however, he did live through that era and probably saw some of the types of posters I'm describing since he grew up in New York, a hotbed of leftist politics throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. But, I digress.

If you know Kirby's career at all, it should come as no surprise that a man of Kirby's vast technical skill and protean imagination would also want to turn some of his artistic visions into paintings. For the most part, Kirby didn't paint the super-heroes he drew for so many years for Marvel, DC, Archie and other companies. Instead he turned his outsized imagination to depicting science fiction and fantasy subjects. His style of painting was recognizably his—the vast, complex machines he draws are obviously Kirby—but executed in watercolors and at a larger size than his comics pages.

Probably the main reason he did so few paintings was time. Kirby's work was always in demand. At his peak in the mid-'60s he was penciling a mind-boggling five pages a day. The figures, backgrounds, gadgets and monsters fairly flew from his fingers. I think it's fair to say that on his worst day Jack Kirby was more creative and innovative than any five other comic book artists in the world (with the obvious exceptions of fellow comics giants like Eisner, Kurtzman, Moebius, Wood, Kane, Kubert and Toth, of course).

Kirby's paintings, executed in pencil, ink and watercolors, are marked by the same bizarrely detailed technology and flights of imagination that distinguished his best work in comics, such as *The Fantastic Four* or *The Mighty Thor*, something Kirby himself knew was not unique to the comics medium. As he noted in the book *sorcerers*, "I believe there is a common feeling shared by all true artist-story tellers (sic) who produce distinctive products which inevitably gain audience attention. Somehow, attaining that goal is not only a necessity in economic and security terms, but in an individual compulsion to perform. It is the

The faceless Robot Head is one of Kirby's most mysterious and enigmatic watercolor images.

kind of thing that separates the true artist-story teller from the methodical craftsman whose need is consummate perfection."

Aficionados of Kirby's comic book work will be quick to see just how much of the subject matter in his paintings is prefigured in his comic book artwork, in the elaborate technology crammed into the pages of various *FF* comic books, in the immense architecture of Valhalla in *Thor*, and in the bizarre science fiction vistas that characterized all of his fantasy and sci-fi work from the *Sky Masters* newspaper strip through *The Race for the Moon* comic, *Kamandi* and in all the weird little sf stories he did for Atlas and Harvey before reigniting the super-hero boom with his huge stable of unforgettable characters.

Indeed, in his comic book work, from the mid-'60s on, you can see Kirby straining to break through the boundaries of comics to create a new storytelling vocabulary for graphic fiction. As evidence of this, check out his photo collages in *The FF*, *Thor* or *Jimmy Olson* from 1967-1974. He clearly had much more to say with his art than he could reasonably fit onto a comics page. These photo collages were subsequently emulated by colleagues such as Jim Steranko, and undoubtedly influenced the subsequent work of dynamic realists like Neal Adams and Paul Gulacy (among others).

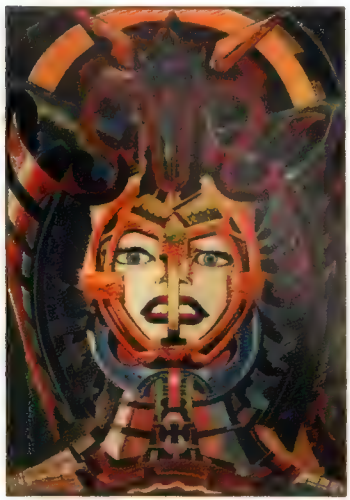
Kirby's vision as a painter includes depictions of UFOs and Mayan temples, alien spacemen, gods, robots, monsters, male and female warriors in ornate armor and helmets carrying weapons that only ever existed in Kirby's protean imagination, and bizarre, futuristic technology. My personal favorite of all his paintings is titled "Galactic Head" (watercolor, 1969). It's a monolithic

Many of the figures in Kirby's paintings are clothed in elaborate armor and helmets reminiscent of Marvel's The Mighty Thor.

portrait of an astronaut's head, whose boldly colored shapes appear to owe as much to the abstractions of the Dutch de Stijl movement or early '60s Pop Art as they do to Kirby's earlier work in comics. Almost equally striking is another watercolor entitled "Robot Head," depicting a faceless creature with a head more intricate than anything that ever emerged from Reed Richards' laboratory.

Some of his other watercolor paintings like "Wild Woman," basically just a headshot, demonstrate the evident power of Kirby's limitless imagination.

It's a real loss to the art world that Kirby didn't do more paintings. He could have contributed some striking book covers, movie posters and works of fine art. Even if Kirby never did comics and only did this handful of canvases, these paintings would have shown him to be an important artist, possessed of a singular



Wild Woman, which for years hung on the wall of the Kirbys' living room, is typical of the super-heroic women who populated the universe of Jack Kirby's imagination.

vision. Long Live the King!

It's no wonder that the animation industry tapped Kirby in the '70s and '80s in order to channel his boundless creativity into developing visuals, concepts and character designs for new shows. Jack Kirby had more ideas than he could have developed in half a dozen lifetimes.

In the end, Kirby's paintings can be viewed in the same light as his photo collages, simply as another artistic avenue for Kirby's restless imagination. According to friend and sometime collaborator Mark Evanier, making collages was one Kirby's favorite activities. And many thousands of magazine pages were consumed by this activity. Kirby did many for his own amusement, but a number of them wound up in his comic book stories. However, he was apparently unhappy with the poor reproduction he got and stopped doing them in comics after 1974. One exception to that is the well-reproduced collage included in Kirby's *Hunger Dogs* graphic novel that wrapped up his *New Gods* series many years after its original publication.

And while Kirby's collages are interesting, they, like his paintings, are really only a pastime, hobbies through which Kirby expressed the torrent of ideas that were too much for the comics medium to contain.

# comic book

**RIGHT: Alex Ross' rendition of *Action Comics* #1. ABOVE: Joe Shuster's original cover. BELOW: Full-length Superman poster by Alex Ross. OPPOSITE PAGE: Ross' portrait of The Joker from his abandoned *Portraits of Villainy* project.**

# superstar!

## COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE INTERVIEW:

# ALEX ROSS

by Michael Kronenberg

If there ever were an equivalent to rock star or superstar status in the comic book industry, then Alex Ross would fit the bill. His ten-year career has been meteoric, to say the least. Quite extraordinary, considering that the comic book industry has been in a prolonged slump. Similar to Kirby, Adams, and Miller, Alex Ross has blazed a new trail with his unique interpretation of the comic book superhero. Ross exploded upon mainstream comics with the mini-series *Marvels*. His realistic, gouache painted renditions of Marvel's Golden, Silver and Bronze Age characters took the industry by storm. He next moved over to DC to provide what would be his opus, *Kingdom Come*. Set in the future, it tells the story of a world overrun by meta-humans that have lost their resolve in their protection of the earth and its inhabitants. It falls upon the shoulders of the JLA and its leader, Superman, to come out of retirement and try to save mankind. With the massive success of *Kingdom Come*, Ross became the most sought after artist in comics. He has produced numerous comic book covers, posters, prints, three tabloid-size stories featuring DC's icon characters (Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain Marvel), and overseen Marvel's *Universe X*. His contributions have gone beyond traditional comics. He has designed toys, painted the poster for the Academy Awards, several covers for *TV Guide*, and worked on films, including *Unbreakable* and *Spider-Man* (his designs were unused). This past year has seen the release of two important Ross projects. *Mythology: The DC*

*Art of Alex Ross* is written and designed by designer-extraordinaire Chip Kidd. It examines Ross' brief, but busy career at DC. It is a beautifully designed book, fitting for a Van Gogh, Picasso or Pollack, and Ross' talent is fitting for such a lofty presentation. The other project is the culmination of his tabloid DC books with his partner Paul Dini. In *JLA: Liberty and Justice*, Dini and Ross bring back the original Justice League of America to battle an alien force that threatens global infection. It's a wonderful and pure superhero story that thankfully ignores some of DC's current continuity baggage.

**Trade cover for Mythology. BELOW: The beautiful wraparound cover to the prestige edition, depicting the DC heroes vs. the DC villains.**

**Comic Book Marketplace**: What were your favorite comic titles when you were growing up?

**Alex Ross**: Oh, *Spider-Man*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Justice League*, *Avengers*, you know, those were the biggies. You mean like specific stories? Like Spidey super-stories? Well… Those are the basics really.

**CBM**: The new book *Mythology*, the collection of your art from DC Comics. How do you like having your work collected in a coffee table art book in the tradition of Picasso and Van Gogh?

**Ross**: [Laughter] Uh, you know I'm surprisingly taking things for granted. It's something that is a big goal because it's sort of overwhelming because of it being Chip [Kidd], it's a big deal. You know what I mean? With Chip's design sense and who he is and his time now to have caught him at this point where, obviously through my being friends with him and through the fact that he was enough of a fan of my work to conceive this.

**CBM**: The book is highly unusual. I studied art history, I went to Art College, and I have been a comics fan and I've never seen anything quite like the book. Dedicated to one comic book artist and his work. Chip Kidd is one of the best designers in the business, how did you like

Batman takes on his rogues gallery. RIGHT: Ross' full-length Wonder Woman poster.

working with him and what did he bring special to the project?

**Ross**: Well the whole thing just doesn't exist without Chip. I mean, if it was designed by any other individual it just wouldn't be the same kind of book or have nearly the impact. It's not wholly successful based upon having some big shots of some of my paintings, it's the vision attached to it in terms of what he is looking at. If I designed this book myself it wouldn't be as good of a book, not by any stretch. It takes an outside force, a person with a discriminating eye who can see details and things and pull out a certain analysis of the material that very few people can. That's the key to his success as a designer.

**CBM**: It is obvious he has a love of comics from his past books and a love of your work. Definitely a passion—the book is very passionate.

**Ross**: Lots of love making going on. [Laughter] Yeah, he is just so incredibly impressive with what he can do and what he continues to do before and now. So it was just a striking work to see it all pasted together.

I had to detach myself as much as possible as well to sort of see it from an outsider's point of view or maybe even a fan's point of view to think if there was anything, being on the inside working on it, is there anything that I would want more of as a fan? And moreover, you're just overwhelmed with what he has come up with that no one would have even conceived of. Like these crazy paper puppet things that he picked out, that I wouldn't have cared about for two seconds, and I've gotten I don't know how many compliments from people…

**CBM**: Well they're wonderful.

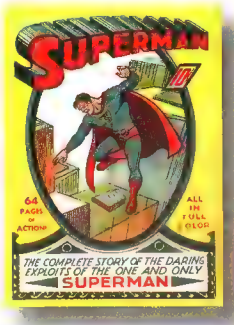
**Ross**: That is their favorite thing…and why the hell are they wonderful?

**CBM**: I know how you feel. You're the artist, and something you're embarrassed about, it is something you did as a kid. What I loved was the way Chip presented it with the dialogue between the two of you.

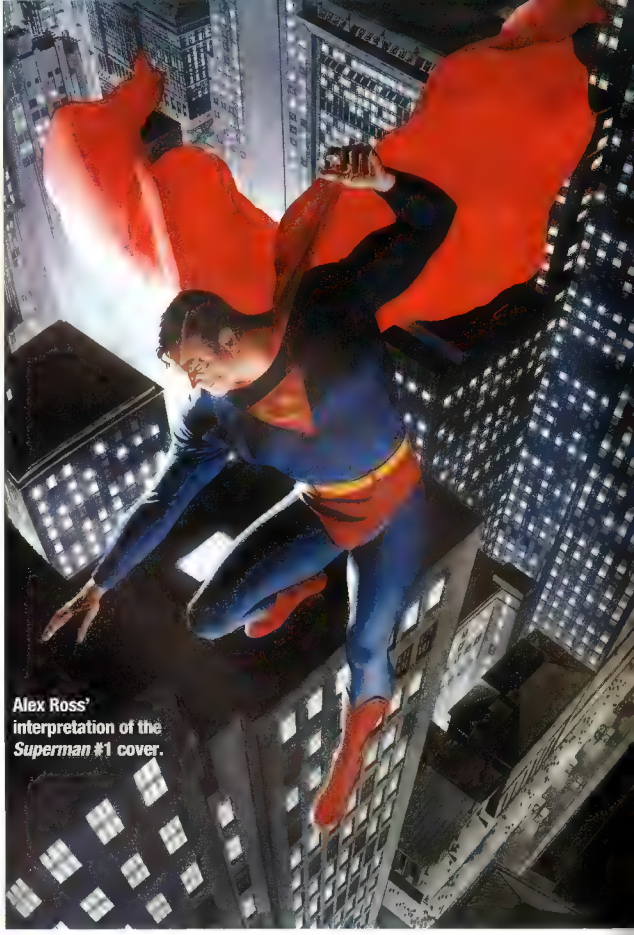
**Ross**: Which is made up.

**CBM**: Oh, it is! That's made up? That is interesting. Okay, because he did something similar in *Batman Collected* where he had a dialogue with a collector about a Batman floaty thing.

**Ross**: Right. I remember that dialogue and I'm sure that was also made up. Whatever transpired between us in person would have probably been whatever element of my disgust at the idea that he was actually using this.




As it was I wasn't telling him not to use any certain things or giving him very specific direction, I was pretty much trying to be hands off as much as possible. So it was one of those kinds of things where he saw something that I didn't, and apparently everybody else does now too. That's the thing, I'm the artist and I'm not perfectly in touch with what people perceive and what they can be affected by.



**Alex Ross' interpretation of the *Superman* #1 cover.**

**CBM**: You're a little too close to the subject.

**Ross**: Absolutely. You know, I look at it from the ego point of view of I don't want anybody to see something of mine that's not perfect from any age. I want them to look at a drawing from when I was 13 and say "Wow, that's pretty good for age 13!" You know I don't want something that is my worst drawing from age 13, or the case of these little puppets things, which I believe I did when I was 11. I know I was a much better artist than this then. It was more I was making them to look like toys.

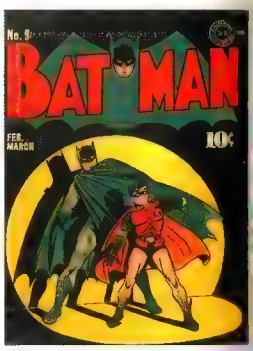
**CBM**: That's how they come across. What you're talking about is something that I always equated with being an artist and starting to show your work—it's almost the equivalent of pulling your pants down in front of people. Because it's personal and you never know what the reaction is going to be.

**Ross**: Right. We've obviously with this book itself in terms of overwhelming work from one's career, well not one's career, but more from one's personal history before they were anybody… This doesn't have a load of that in here, it only has a few bits and bobs before it moves into the professional work. So it's not like I've been completely ashamed of being exposed for my idiosyncrasy. I have a hell of a lot more stuff that could truly do that. But as it is it has to be focused upon one main goal, which it does.

**Ross' rework of the classic Jack Burnley *Batman* #9 cover.**

**CBM**: How did the book come about? Was this something that Chip approached you with? Pantheon approached you?

**Ross**: No. This was all because of one Charlie Kochman. Charlie's my editor who I've been working with for about ten years now. He's been there for the entire length of my relationship with DC. He hired me to do the *Doomsday and Beyond* trade paperback cover back in 1993. And he had this idea saying it would be a great thing to use Chip for and the idea would be for a coffee table book on me. He thought that Chip could possibly interest Pantheon,



his publisher he works for. You know, you get all the things to come together and he just had a vision of it. And I didn't have a vision and Chip didn't have a vision. He first had to convince me that it was a good idea, and I'm trying to be as humble as possible in thinking maybe it's a little too early for a ten-year career in comics to be honored in this way. Don't you need to honor all the old farts before you get to the young punks? And the thing is that you can't get distracted with those issues. If I'm worth anything to the marketplace in terms of grabbing some attention for what the field of comics may represent for today, then that's all the better for helping us all out.

**CBM**: There's no doubt. I think that what you've done and what you've brought to the comics and how different it is, is definitely helping. And I think the book will too—the fact that it's everywhere.

**A panel from Captain Marvel's origin, appearing in Paul Dini and Alex Ross' *Shazam: Power of Hope*.**

**Hal Jordan makes a welcome return in *JLA: Liberty and Justice*.**

**Ross**: It's the kind of book it is, that it's a coffee table book, that it's not specifically another one of my graphic novels. It has a whole different kind of esthetic to it that will hit home with people, but everything about it for the layman who comes to it will scream to them, "Hey, maybe I want to read more of one of these things," because they will clearly see that here is another story thing that is reflected on, here is another one, and another one. It goes through each one of my projects in a way that is a wonderful travelogue that's completely out of order but how he did it is actually just a great arrangement. It was one of the things I was most impressed with was how Chip wrote the book.

**CBM**: I liked how he broke the entire book down.

**Ross**: It sort of means that the project that my entire career leads up to happened as my first project with DC, not as most recent project. So, as irony would have it, I've been basically working my way backwards. But ultimately the idea coming from Charlie, then convincing me, then, of course, convincing Chip, and I mean at some point I'm just sort of looking at it like just shut up and go along with it because if it could happen with Chip and with the potential of this coffee table book, you want it. Your ego wants it; your business wants it; everything would be good out of this situation. Chip actually took a little time to come around himself, because he was very busy with work regarding his novel, which he had just completed and he needed to deal with the promotion he was doing on that.

***Kingdom Come* is a perennial best seller for DC and changed the way we look at the future of super heroes.**

**CBM**: You're talking about *Cheese Monkeys*. So this

# Mike Hill: Sculptor of The Fantastic

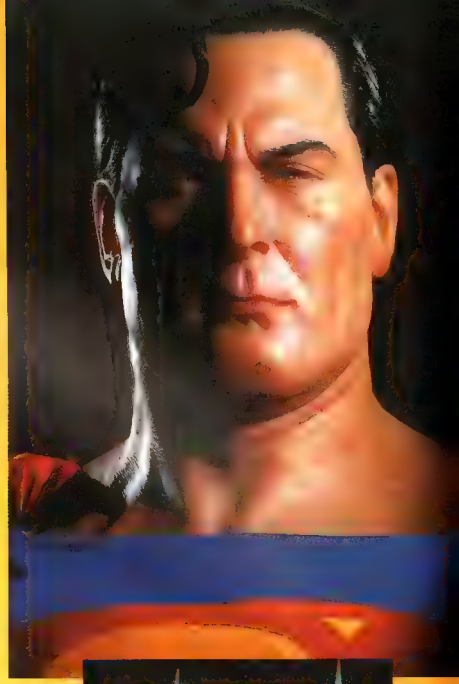
**CBM:** Can you give us a little background information on yourself? You work for one of the wax museums in London, correct?

**Hill:** My ambition as a child was to draw comic books, but things didn't quite turn out that way and I began specializing in 3D sculpture. My work has covered a diverse range such as toys, model kits, costumes, character design, make-up, animatronics and wax figures. I was always fascinated with making the fantastic 'real', for want of a better word; this led to my working at Tussauds waxworks.

**CBM:** What sparked the idea to create life-size sculpted replicas of Alex Ross' superhero paintings?

**Hill:** Well, after seeing Alex's work in *Marvels* I became a fan of his work...actually that's an understatement, I thought his rendition of Spidey, Gwen and the Green Goblin in book four was almost paranormal. I was seeing for the first time in my life all these wonderful characters really come to life, it was as though somebody actually filmed the moment. I still sit and study every panel of that particular sequence. Ten years later and I'm still in awe.

But although Spidey is my favorite character, I think its Alex's take on Superman that I and most others perceive as Alex's defining character interpretation. You just believe that this God-like person really exists. Every expression, nuance and general body language is just so natural, so believable and so Superman. Originally I was going to do a small-scale figure but then of course Alex himself produced one. Then I thought, wait a sec, imagine creating a life-size version with real hair, a real costume etc. all 6'4 of him! This is my forte after all. I told Alex of my plan and because of his enthusiasm and encouragement, well there was no going back!



**CBM:** Can you tell us a little about the process of creating your sculptures? What materials do you use and how much time does each piece take?

**Hill:** On a wax figure, I start with a lump of clay and spend several weeks achieving the likeness. This is then molded in rubber and molten wax is poured into the mould. After this has cooled, out pops a wax version of my sculpture, this is given a fine clean up. Next I have to insert thousands of hairs mostly one at a time, this takes days! Then there is making the eyes, painting the skin etc. All in all, this takes up to six weeks or more. And that's just the head!

**CBM:** Has Alex been involved with the process?

**Hill:** Alex is involved to give advice and criticism; these are based on his designs after all. And who could ask for anything better than to have Alex's enthusiasm help you go that extra length.

**CBM:** What are you currently working on?

**Hill:** I've just finished Wolverine for Dynamic Forces line of 1/1 busts. On the wax pieces, I'm in the midst of creating a version of the Joker. I want it to look very close to Alex's rendition, which in turn was based on *The Man Who Laughs* silent movie. But I want to go a little deeper than usual; I mean what exactly does the Joker's bleached flesh look like, IF it was reality. There's a lot of scope. I want him to look very unnerving. It's a challenge.

whole thing goes back kind of far.

**Ross**: A couple of years or so. I think *Cheese Monkeys* came out two years ago. So at least two years. And it wasn't terribly long before Chip kind of came around on it, but I was always afraid that we were calling too much upon our friendship with this guy…because we're really good friends with him, and I've had the chance to work with Chip on a number of things already—the coffee table books for the history of DC, big one shots, you know, Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman.

So, with all that, I've had the Chip experience, I've had lots of personal time with Chip, so this wouldn't have changed all that. So it was sort of like he was doing me the greatest of compliments and favors with this thing. I just hope that it's the kind of thing that gratifies enough of him internally with how he feels about comics and what he got out of it, because he certainly put so much into it.

**CBM**: You can tell. Like I said, it seems to be a very passionate book about your work, about comics, about art, and the process of making art too. What was your reaction to the Mike Hill sculptures of your interpretations of Superman and Batman because they're very lifelike but they're a little frightening, too?

**Ross**: The whole thing kind of came about for no other reason than Mike wanted to make Superman for himself. I had never really even imagined a wax works statue. I always thought that someday I might actually want to make a life size or larger-than-life bronze of Superman in a standing pose. And so here comes along this very talented guy who could very well save me the trouble in a way of achieving a quick dream of seeing this lifelike, life-size character, but now it's actually going to look like a person as opposed to a statue. So the Superman was commissioned in 2000, and that's when I got it from him. It was premiered in the Chicago Wizard World show of that year. This is actually the first real showing-off of that in a way that people could see and appreciate it. When Wizard had it at their show, not only did it do next to nothing to promote the fact that I had all this original artwork plus that statue there, but they only included a photograph in their magazine about they size of your thumb. Considering what it looked like and the magnificence of just the reality of something like that, it seemed a little bit shy of…it was taking it for granted basically. Not showing a lot of vision on their part. So I was really happy that the opportunity here came in to do this right and Geoff (Spear) and Chip were of a mind to really show off what this guy had done. Let alone the fact they showed off the sculptures I had done myself with Superman and Captain Marvel. It was really cool to see this thing get the treatment it deserved where you could look at it and just feel like, "Wow, that's a human being!" There's a sense to it like there is a photograph or many photographs in the book of Alex's Superman as a guy, an actual guy.

**Full length view of Mike Hill's Batman sculpture, and Ross' full length poster of Batman (left).**

**CBM**: It definitely gives a feel of flesh and blood that you go for in your work, and it's almost like a verification of your work in a way, that this 3D prop exists and looks so realistic. It's very interesting. It's as if your work had jumped out of the book and was standing there. I think what it accomplished, especially the Batman one, is that he's frightening—the way Batman used to be. He's really scary looking.

**Ross**: It doesn't hurt it any. In fact if he had no eyes he would look like a zombie.

**CBM**: Absolutely. I know that you have spoken

THE MEDIA WAS ON IT IN A HEARTBEAT, NATURALLY. THE MILITARY WON'T BE FAR BEHIND. THE UNTHINKABLE HAS HAPPENED: THE MOST POWERFUL BEING ON THE PLANET HAS MYSTERIOUSLY GONE BERSERK.
AND NOW I'LL DO WHAT I PROMISED HIM.
THE TRUST.
STORY BY CHIP KIDD & ALEX ROSS
LETTERING BY TODD KLEIN
ARTWORK PHOTOGRAPHED BY GEOFF SPEAR
SUPERMAN CREATED BY JERRY SIEGEL & JOE SHUSTER
BATMAN CREATED BY
EDITED BY CHARLES KOCHMAN

about that a lot, about Batman's eyes. That's true, if he had the white slits he wouldn't look as realistic. But I think he is also scarier with the eyes showing.

**Ross**: I just actually acquired this piece with the finished body for my home. It arrived three days before the party I had for Halloween. It's a very impressive looking piece. Most people are much more taken with it than Superman because it's new and it's Batman. Most people like Batman more than Superman. So there you go.

**CBM**: There's a Batmobile that's shown in the book that is your design and you worked on with your brother. I knew nothing about that and I was wondering where it is? Have you driven it?

**Ross**: No, never. It's the kind of thing that has never been fully completed as far as it being a real workable vehicle. It's still with the mechanic to this day who has devoted some time to it. It's kind of a summer project; it's perpetually in a state of never being completed. It kind of just sits there, and I have no ambition at the moment to want to drive around in the Batmobile. It's fun to have in front of my house as a prop for Halloween, but aside from that I don't desire to be Batman. At a young age it seemed like a really cool thing to try to set people on their ear by driving a Batmobile in public.

**CBM**: The two exclusives in the book are a retelling of Robin's origin that was written with Paul Dini and a *World's Finest* story with Chip Kidd. I love the Superman/Batman story, and it reminded me of the Silver Age *World's Finest* that Curt Swan did. Were you guys looking at that as an inspiration for this?

SO THAT'S IT.
MY ONE RULE--THE ONE I SWORE ON MY PARENTS' GRAVE I'D NEVER BREAK. ABOUT GUNS. NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO MAKE ME DO IT. NOT EVEN THE JOKER.
BUT I'LL DO IT FOR YOU.
BLAMM!!

**OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: Pages 1 and 5 from the Alex Ross/Chip Kidd *World's Finest* story appearing in *Mythology*. The idea of the story was created around the bold images of Batman firing a pistol and Superman breaking through *The Daily Planet* building's rooftop globe.**

**Alex's Batmobile, which he designed and built with the aide of his brother. It remains a work-in-progress.**

**Ross**: I think that what we come in as fans and the attitude that Chip, myself, or Paul Dini have had is that the separation that occurred thanks to Frank Miller in the late '80s is something that need not be an entire rewriting of the history of these characters where the relationship need always to be this thrown-out thing, that these two wouldn't be friends, that a genuine friendship between the two isn't possible. We believe that there should be some going back on that in terms of taking my somewhat darkly realized Batman and putting it in a situation where you're trying to expound upon the fact that these guys would have a more genteel relationship and not do it in a way that is so contradictory or insulting to what they currently do today, but put some face

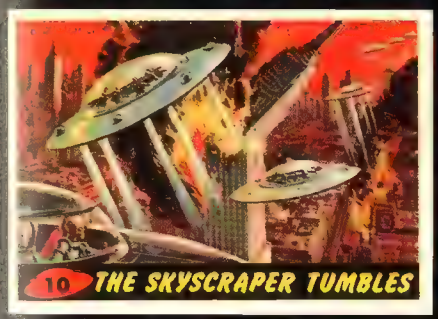
**continued on page 60**

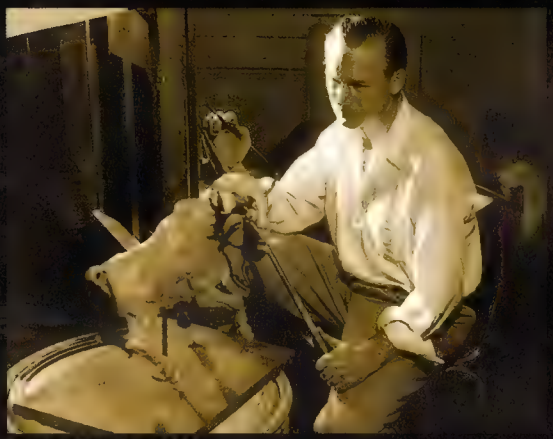
# NORMAN SAUNDERS un

# der covers of darkness

**by Steve Kronenberg**

When a "baby boomer" gets to be my age, "mid-life crisis" can take many forms. Some of us buy motorcycles or sports cars to recapture our bygone youth. Others of us try to date women young enough to be our daughters. Still others, perhaps less adventurous, hearken back to memorable moments in which we first connected with popular culture: our first comic book, our first visit to a movie theater or drive in, the first time we got to stay up late and watch an old horror movie on *Shock Theater*. For me, the comic book, movie theater and *Shock Theater* experiences were all epiphanies—along with one other experience: my first encounter in 1962 with Topps' legendary *Mars Attacks* trading cards. Forget about the stale bubblegum included in every 5¢ pack. These were cards that spoke to me and every other young fan of horror and science fiction: a grisly, gutsy, pulpy chronicle of a Martian invasion of Earth. The cards depicted skull-faced Martians, their brains fully exposed, wreaking havoc on planet Earth. They traveled in deco-shaped flying saucers straight out of a 1950's Saturday matinee—perhaps influenced by Ray Harryhausen's creations in 1956's *Earth Versus The Flying Saucers* and they were armed with a cache of deadly ray guns that could freeze or burn to death any hapless Earthling (or dog) that stood in their way. But perhaps their deadliest weapon was an enlarging ray that turned ordinary insects into gigantic, carnivorous monsters—another throwback to the "B" movie mutants of the 1950s. For those of us raised on horror and science fiction movies, *Mars Attacks* was a cultural watershed—equivalent to the development of jazz, modern art and the invention of the light bulb. The cards' garish bloodletting (by the Martians, Earthlings and giant bugs) prompted parents to complain to Topps, who eventually pulled the cards from the marketplace.





**Norman Saunders, 1951.**

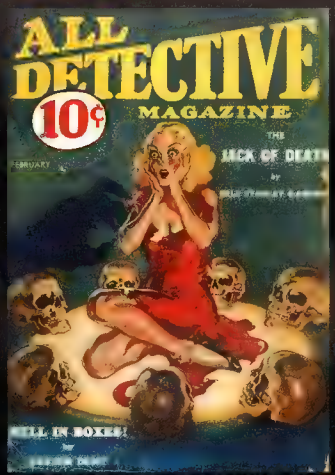
Despite the cards' compelling story line (a derivative but exciting serialization that was written on the back of each card) it was the cards' lurid, pulpy colors that kept us coming back—compulsively buying pack after pack to find new cards to add to our collections. We now know that the great Wally Wood completed the line drawings for the cards. But it was Norman Blaine Saunders who painted them in the lurid, garish colors that mesmerized us. For me, Saunders' paintings *were Mars Attacks*: uncannily life-like visions of terror awash in bold, colors. It was *Saunders'* style—honed from his days as a painter of pulp and comic book covers—that caught our eyes and kept us spending our nickels.

But, while *Mars Attacks* may have been Saunders' greatest and best known single artistic achievement, it was by no means his only important work. Saunders painted in a multitude of palettes, making significant and memorable contributions to comic books, pulps and paperback covers with dazzling productivity. Yet, not nearly enough has been written about him. The best Saunders reference to this day is the superb website developed by his son David (www.normansaunders.com) which details the man's biographical background and incredible artistic diversity.

Saunders was born in Minnesota on January 1, 1907. According to the biographical information on the website, he always had a jaundiced, somewhat skeptical view of the human condition, and his artistic ability became obvious early in his childhood. Even the doodles which were drawn in the margins of his textbooks fascinated his classmates, who actually wanted to claim Saunders' used books for their own use the following semester. The school even set up a lottery to select the lucky winners. Later, Saunders won a full scholarship to the Chicago Art Institute and began earning extra money by mailing drawings to his favorite magazine, *Captain Billy's Whiz Bang*, published by Fawcett Publications in Minneapolis. Soon, Fawcett reciprocated by paying Saunders for his work. Saunders decided to become a full time artist, dropped his scholarship and began working full time for Fawcett. Saunders' early work for such Fawcett Publications as *Modern Mechanix*, *Technocrats* and *Hooey* quickly displayed his potential for greatness. But Saunders really learned to paint when he moved to New York and began taking classes from the great Harvey Dunn at the Grand Central Art School. Soon, he was supporting himself in fine style by painting the covers for pulps such as *Eerie Mysteries*, *Ten Detective Aces*, *Wild West Weekly* and *Saucy Movie Tales*. When he joined the service during World War II, Saunders extensively cataloged his wartime experiences for several magazines, the superb artwork of which appears on David Saunders' website. Indeed, Saunders' own favorite works were the watercolors that he did depicting life in China on the Burma Road. In addition to his pulp work, Saunders' postwar work included paintings for the lurid adventure and detective paperbacks from Ace and Bantam publishing. Ellene Politis, the young Greek model that Saunders used in much of his work, later became his wife. Saunders also branched out into painting the covers for men's adventure magazines such as *True*, *Saga* and *Real*.

But before *Mars Attacks* and the adventure magazines and later the beloved *Wacky Packs* of the mid 1960s, Saunders honed his artistic chops in the pulps—particularly the "dime detective" books which displayed his unmatched aptitude for drawing beautiful girls trapped in nightmarish, noirish scenarios.

Any examination of Saunders' early pulp work reveals an obsession with detail and a sense of forward-moving action—as if his scenes were projected *off* the paper and into our very laps! An early example of Saunders' aggressive style is the January 1929 issue of *Modern Mechanix* in which Saunders illustrated an




***All-Detective Magazine*** **(Feb 1934, Dell)**

**All Novels (Nov 1938, Ace).**

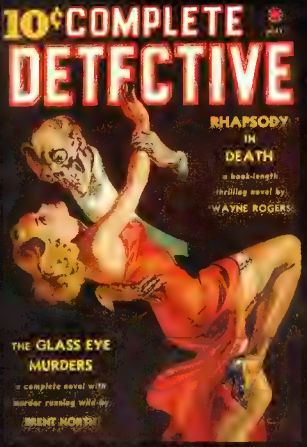
ticle on 3D movies. Saunders' style of projecting action forward was the perfect complement to the article. The illustration shows rolling tanks, charging soldiers and a flying World War I Fokker about to leap forward from the movie screen into the theater and onto a rapt audience! Saunders' eye for detail was also depicted from the mechanics of the tanks to the soldiers' grimaces, to the filigree work inside the movie theater. This illustration was the first example of Saunders' cinematic, 3D style. Later, his cover painting for the June 1932 issue of *Modern Mechanix* shows a huge cannon pointing out beyond the cover. Saunders depicts the weapon's enormous size by painting it in perspective against the relatively tiny weapons shack alongside the cannon. Again, the sense of forward movement is unmistakable. And on the cover of the 1933 issue of *Technocrats' Magazine* Saunders delivers a gigantic robot holding a helpless man with the nation's Capitol Building in the background. In this earliest of Saunders' science fiction work, the metallic monster seems to be striding towards the reader—displaying Saunders' cinematic, aggressive style.

As Saunders settled into pulp work in the 1930s, we notice that his style of forward-moving action is augmented by a precise sense of balance and composition, an aptitude for depicting a sense of quiet menace and an uncanny ability to capture the beauty of the female form. Saunders' cover for Volume Ten of *All-Detective Magazine* (1933) is exemplary of his peerless sense of balance. A huge skull dominates the image, inside of which is a psychotic killer torturing a beautiful half-naked girl. The skull's eye socket is actually the killer's head, while the skull's teeth represent the bottles of chemicals the killer is about to inject into the girl! Saunders' ability to paint images within images would serve him well throughout his pulp career.

During the 1930s Saunders also became adept at painting split-screen covers. For the covers of *Ten Short Novels* (V.1, N.1 1938) and *All Novels* (V.1. N.2 1938), Saunders divides the cover into sections depicting action scenes from multiple stories, with each scene flowing in the same direction, creating a sharp sense of unity and balance to the paintings.

***All-Detective Magazine* (Jan 1935, Dell).**

Saunders' unmistakable 3D style was also in full bloom during the 1930s. His best pulp painting may have been his cover for the January 1935 issue of *All-Detective*, illustrating "The Sign of the Serpent." A huge, humanoid cobra, its hood fully spread, looms over a beautiful, terrified girl. The creature holds two knives that appear to be fangs. The girl herself appears to be sacrificed and held up by two pairs of sinister, deformed hands. The monster dominates and envelops the image, appearing to float up off the cover and loom above the


10¢ COMPLETE
DETECTIVE
RHAPSODY IN DEATH
a book-length thrilling novel by WAYNE ROGERS
THE GLASS EYE MURDERS
a complete novel with murder running wild by BRENT NORTH

***Complete Detective* (May 1938, Red Circle).**

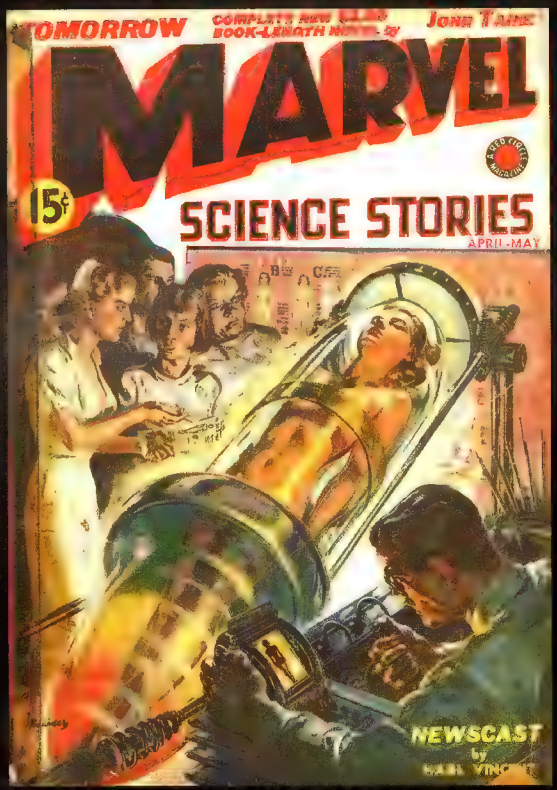
reader! Saunders' eye for color was never better exemplified: the cobra itself is a mixture of green and gold, its half-man underbelly marked by the dark outline of a tuxedo! The girl's flimsy, flame-red gown and golden hair complement the eerie golden colors of the cobra—a beautifully balanced and eerily-lit tableau. And note Saunders' cover for the May 1938 issue of *Complete Detective* ("Rhapsody in Death"), picturing a tuxedo-clad rotted corpse dancing with a beautiful, mesmerized girl dressed in a garish green gown. Saunders draws the gown as if it were about to float off the cover—while his eye for detail depicts the girl's shapely leg and exposed garter belt! Both "Sign of the Serpent" and "Rhapsody in Death" were as close as Saunders got to the horror genre—which is a pity.

Saunders' sense of balance and composition is also amply displayed in his cover for the final issue of *Sure-Fire Detective* (1937). The story was "The 13th Juror" and Saunders' cover delivers a hardened yet beautiful girl firing a gun. And in back of her, a misshapen man brandishing a knife peers from a flame-red curtain. Yet it's the *curtain* that dominates the painting, encircling the entire image as the centerpiece of the painting—and lending a note of subtle menace to the piece.

It was that ability to convey a sense of subtle menace and creeping doom that also pervaded much of Saunders' pulp work through the 1930s. His cover for a 1936 issue of *Saucy Movie Tales* ("The Melting Pot Murders") conveys very little action, but delivers a subtly chilling sense of doom: a beautiful girl is seen chained and hanging over a cauldron of molten lead. For another cover of *Ten Detective Aces* (V. 32 N.4, 1938), Saunders simply gives us a close up of a terrified girl holding back a disembodied, knife-wielding hand. Without any scenes of furious action, Saunders uses the girl's wide, terrified eyes and contorted facial muscles to depict an insidious air of menace and doom.

The 1930s also saw Saunders developing his peerless skill for combining lurid, bold colors with images of beautiful women in distress. One of his most justly famous covers for *Marvel Science Stories* (V.1, N.4, 1939) depicts a beautiful woman confined inside a glass tube, awaiting experimentation by a gaggle of scientists and onlookers. The bottom of the tube glows an eerie green, poised against the rest of the colors to achieve an alien, other-worldly effect. For the August 1937 cover of *Eerie Stories*, Saunders gives us a gorgeous, terrified blonde, her red dress torn up to her thigh, her black, transparent bra on full display, menaced by a psychotic holding a glowing green blowtorch as a melting rod drips green molten lead onto the floor. The garish color combination, including the girl's own blonde tresses, augments an already-unsettling scene of impending torture. And for the cover of the December 1935 *New Mystery Adventures* ("Eye of the Fiend") Saunders paints a naked blonde held captive by a mad doctor, both depicted against a dark blue background. The girl's porcelain-white body, contrasted with the dark blue, accentuates the sense of dark menace conveyed by the cover painting.

Saunders' unparalleled aptitude for balance and composition, his ability to temper action with subtlety and his talent for using color combinations were all honed in the 1930s. During the 1940s, Saunders further developed his style and entered his most prolific period of painting. His talent for depicting forward-moving action was refined even further by the 1940s. For the cover of the September 1940 issue of *Ten Story Detective*, Saunders painted a beautiful girl dressed in yellow, gagged and bound as a hero flies to her rescue to fend off two menacing thugs. This time, it's our *hero* who appears to be running




***Marvel Science Stories* (April 1939, Postal Publications).**

*erie Stories* (Aug 1937, Ace).

traight for the edge of the cover and directly *into* the reader! nd for the November 1940 *Ten Detective Aces*, we see our hero t the beautiful girl on his shoulders as the two are pursued by angry mob—with everyone appearing to run *toward* the ader. A burning pier in the background offsets the furious ction that seems to move ever closer to us.

And Saunders' superb ability to balance and compose a ainting was never better displayed than in the 1940s. His cover r the January 1940 issue of *Ten Detective Aces* ("Death Picks he Beauty Queen") is masterful. Done in Saunders' classically rid style, it depicts a living skull holding a gold crown and overing over a line up of leggy beauty contestants—each of hom appears progressively smaller as the line up winds ross the cover. It's a painting marked by all three of unders' greatest attributes: a sense of subtle menace, finely- ned balance and composition, and bold, garish color. For the bruary 1940 issue of *Lone Wolf Detective*, Saunders depicts a l-dressed girl hanging for her very life from the top of a building as bullets whiz past her head. Her frantic leg movements as she struggles are complemented by the furious ashots and the hero's struggle to save her—all of which are blended superbly by Saunders. And Saunders' cover for the May 1949 issue of *Ten Detective Aces* ("You're Dead Right!") illustrates his ability to use lush color as a framing device: a girl in a lurid green dress fights off a menacing thug on a Tunnel of Love ride. But what catches our eye is the garishly red portion of the Tunnel of Love car, which frames the scene and draws us into the action which Saunders depicts.

*New Mystery Adventures* (Dec 1935, Pierre).

The 1940s also saw Saunders further developing his talents for depicting a quiet, subtle sense of doom. For the April 1942 issue of *Amazing Detective* ("Too Many Men Shared Celia"), Saunders delivers a full-figured beautiful girl, curled in a corner, legs provocatively crossed, garter belt in full view—cowering from an unseen menace as a policeman with gun drawn peers through a barred window. Again, with

*Amazing Detective* (April 1942).

no action Saunders' terrified girl and disembodied hand deliver the lead story's menacing message. And two of Saunders' most atmospheric covers appeared in the late 1940s. The cover of the February 1948 issue of *Detective Book* depicts a starkly haunting image of a girl, dressed in a flowing green gown, holding a pistol. A tuxedo-clad dead man lies at her feet. The garishly green dress seems to glow and light the entire cover—an atmospheric, moody and memorable scene that re-enforces the quiet menace of the pistol packin' dame. Saunders other late 1940s cover is almost as memorable: the October 1948 issue of *Ten-Story Detective* depicts only a pair of gorgeous legs fleeing from a murder scene. The background displays our hero confronting a ghostly specter, with one girl lying on the floor terrified and yet another quite dead. Again, we don't see much action. What we *do* see augments the cover's sense of impending menace and confusion: whose legs are running from the murder scene, who are the extra two girls on the floor, and how does that ghost figure into the mix?

But as subtle as Saunders could be, the 1940s also saw him painting covers depicting furious action. For the May 1941 *Ten-Story Detective* ("Kill Me Again!"), multiple characters are pictured in different modes of action as four killer thugs menace a bound-up girl, each one leering sadistically. The July 1941 issue of *Ten Detective Aces* shows a tough carhop smashing a tray into the face of a customer, cups and plates flying and smashing furiously. This cover best captures Saunders' talent for packing multiple action scenes into one image (Saunders employed this identical image for the September 1948 cover of *Ten Detective Aces*, substituting a cigarette girl for the carhop, and again for the April 1952 cover of *Dime Detective*). Saunders' most action-packed cover was arguably the January 1942 issue of *Detective Short Stories*. In it, a mummy watches from a casket as a disfigured, skull-faced menace dressed as a pharaoh ties up a beautiful girl. The hero rushes in, gun blazing, and is met by a villainous henchman brandishing his own pistol! The cover amply displays Saunders' penchant for painting multiple characters in an array of action poses. The painting is also marked by Saunders' eye for detail: the girl's blouse is soiled and torn and the floor is scattered with shards of rope and a broken piece of the mummy's casket. One of Saunders' lasting contributions was his uncanny ability to moderate between scenes of furious action and depictions of quiet, subtle menace.

**Art from *Ten Detective Aces* (Jul 1941, Ace).**

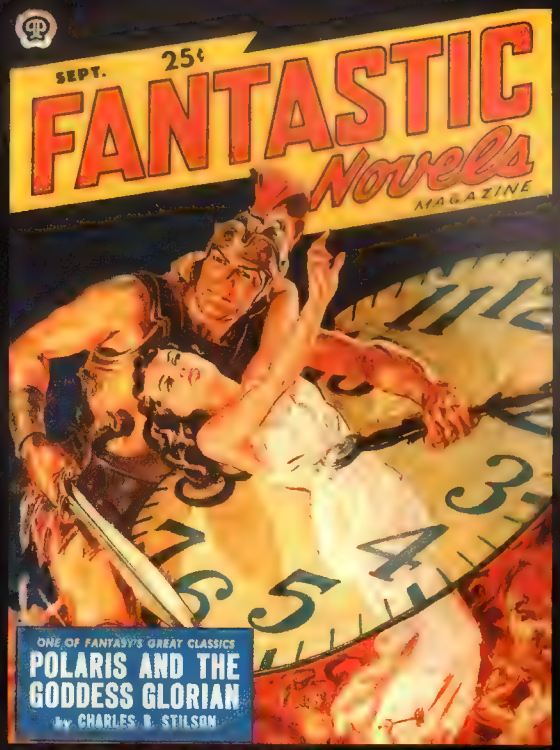
Yet another aspect of Saunders' style blossomed in the 1940s: his ability to depict scenes within scenes. His March 1941 cover of *Ten Detective Aces* shows a terrified girl peering into a crystal ball and seeing herself being strangled by a satanic-looking killer. The painting delivers two scenes: the girl looking through the crystal ball while a menacing, ringed hand is perched above her—and the scene *within* the crystal ball showing her murder. The scene-within-the-scene is clever and eye catching, while also conveying Saunders' unmatched talent for quiet, atmospheric menace. The March 1942 cover for *Ten Detective Aces* ("First Find the Body") shows a dirty thumb holding up a strip of celluloid film in which a man is about to shoot a terrified girl. In the 1930s, we saw Saunders' ability to divide a pulp cover into separate action images, each one symmetrically configured to blend with the others. His picture-within-a-picture style may have been a refinement of those earlier, experimental covers of the '30s. Regardless, both cover styles were eye catching, fascinating blends of color, action and atmosphere—reflective of Saunders' own adventurous, uncompromising personality.

It was with the 1950s—and that decade's repressive stance against pulps and comic books—that Saunders' style became more muted, subtle and dark. Saunders, along with other great Golden Age artists—particularly EC's legendary bullpen—was forced to tone down the violence in his work, as well as the pulchritude of his women. But the suppression, which undoubtedly made Saunders wince, did not compromise the integrity, beauty and moodiness of his work. If anything, these creative constraints resulted in even more atmospheric work by Saunders. His cover for the February 1950 issue of *A. Merritt's Fantasy* delivers a haunting, ghostly image of a beautiful blonde, with full red lips, super-imposed over her own bland-faced facsimile—a refinement of Saunders' trademarked image within an image. The entire image appears to ascend from the horizon of an Alaskan valley, as smoke from a nearby Eskimo village trails up and through the girl's image. In the foreground, an Eskimo and his dog are seen standing over a corpse. The painting's muted tone augments the somber mood created by Saunders, while the images are beautifully balanced and subtly lit.

Saunders' emphasis on subtlety resulted in additional reliance on black backgrounds and darker, noirish scenarios for his '50s cover paintings. For the March 1950 cover of *Dime Detective*, Saunders delivered a red-dressed girl holding a rifle in a dark room—with the garishly colored dress clashing against the impossibly dark background. The March 1950 cover for *New Detective* shows only a black-gloved hand pointing a black gun at a terrified girl. Saunders barely illuminates the scene with a pinpoint of light, creating an ominous sense of menace and doom. Indeed, through the 1950s, Saunders used darkness to compensate for his more sensational and violent earlier works, resulting in some of his moodiest and most atmospheric cover creations: the May 1951 cover for *New Detective* ("This One Will Kill You") depicting a young couple menaced by a gun-toting man on a desolate, dark, rain swept street; the October 1951 *Dime Detective* featuring a girl menaced by three thugs in a background so black the characters are barely discernable, and his final pulp cover—the October 1955 issue of *Famous Detective Stories* ("It's On Your Head")—showing two hands holding a desiccated skull with cabbalistic markings against a dense, dark background.

In an article written by Saunders for *American Illustration* (1958), the artist indicated that he relied heavily on deep blacks for sharp focus, and to give his paintings a sense of solidity. Clearly, the repression of the 1950s had no impact on the integrity and beauty of Saunders' art. He simply muted his style and created works of astonishing subtlety, mood and insidious menace. His earlier, trademarked ability to quietly convey pervasive evil served him well throughout.

Yet, Saunders did not abandon his innovative 3D and image-within-image styles during the 1950s backlash. In addition to his February 1950 cover for *A. Merritt's Fantasy*, the November 1950 cover for *Marvel Science Stories* features a collage of superimposed images: a beautiful redhead, her long tresses flowing, watches as a rugged hero shoots at a wizened menace while a blonde stands wax-like and frozen in place. Saunders bleeds each image into the other and augments the scene with a blend of clashing, lurid colors. For the December 1952 issue of *Detective Tales* ("The Murdering Kind"), Saunders gives us a girl whose sunglass lenses reveal the reflection of her knife-wielding attacker. The sense of impending, imminent doom is unmistakable. And Saunders' 3D style is amply displayed in the September 1950 cover of *Fantastic Novels* ("Polaris and The Goddess Glorian") depicting a girl literally stuck in time—half her body is trapped in and superimposed over a huge clock as a Conan-type warrior struggles to free her.



***Fantastic Novels Magazine* (Sep 1950).**

The pulps unquestionably provided Saunders with the widest palette for his artistry—both in terms of time and creative opportunity. From the '30s through the '50s, the pulps were a showcase for his peerless ability to moderate between furious action, lurid colors, innovative montages, and subtle, dark menace. In the '50s, he responded to repression by producing haunting, moody images that were almost cinematic in quality. In Part Two, we'll see how his ability to vary his style worked wonders in the comic, paperback and trading card genres.

*Steve Kronenberg is the publisher, feature writer, and book critic of* Monsters from the Vault *magazine. He is currently teaming with film historian Tom Weaver on the book* Universal Horrors: The 1950s.

# THE WILD WEST OF

# DOUG WILDEY

by Will Murray

One of two production illustrations done by Doug Wildey for a proposed Doc Savage animated series.

The artistic career of Doug Wildey had an inauspicious if appropriate beginning. His first horse was shot out from under him.

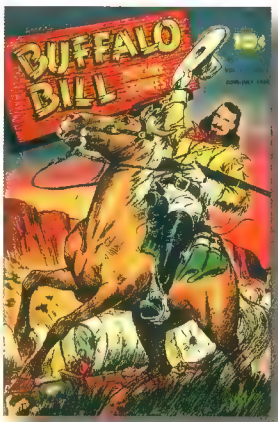
Wildey broke into comic books in 1948, drawing the western exploits of legendary plainsman Buffalo Bill for Street & Smith's *Buffalo Bill Picture Stories*—a revival of their 1909 softcover experiment with the comics format of the same title—and edited by Harold Schwartz. When S&S abruptly folded its comic book and pulp magazine line in the summer of 1949, Wildey was left high and dry-gulched. But not for very long.

The legendary pulp house seems to have sold Buffalo Bill to Youthful Magazines. By autumn 1950, new Wildey stories featuring the same buckskin plainsman began appearing in their *Buffalo Bill Comics.*

That didn't last long, but Wildey soon infiltrated many of the major comics houses, doing work for Lev Gleason, Harvey, Avon and others. While he worked in genres ranging from love to horror, Wildey inevitably gravitated toward the western, contributing to *Redskin, Indian Fighter* and a Buffalo Bill knockoff called *Pawnee Bill.* For Fawcett, he rendered the adventures of popular movie cowboys like Hopalong Cassidy and Lash LaRue.

Wildey once observed, "One of the things you can always do in a western, if nothing else, is draw horses. A horse in practically any position is kind of an exciting thing to look at."

In 1953, Wildey drifted over to Timely Comics, where Stan Lee put him to work drawing




Doug Wildey's first comic book work *Buffalo Bill Picture Stories* #1 (Street & Smith, 1949)

**ABOVE AND BELOW: Two panels from the Rio story "The Hide Butchers" appearing in *Eclipse Monthly* #2 (Sep 1983).**

a flock of stories for *Marvel Tales*, *Mystic*, *Astonishing*, *Battlefield*, *Justice* and many others.

In an astoundingly short time, Wildey's work progressed rapidly from standard '50s four-color fare to a cinematic style that compared favorably with emerging talents like Frank Frazetta, Al Williamson, Joe Orlando and other future masters just coming into the field—yet was uniquely Wildey's own.

It was probably inevitable that Lee would saddle Wildey with one of his posse of Wild West comics. One of the most popular was *Kid Colt, Outlaw*. Editor Stan Lee was constantly recycling the old Billy the Kid-inspired premise of the young misunderstood cowpoke who was really on the side of the law. In this case, the character was called The Outlaw Kid. Actually Civil War veteran turned frontier lawyer Lance Temple, he donned the red bandana-mask and black-and-white outfit of the Outlaw Kid whenever real outlaws struck.

Lee gave Wildey free reign to design the new anti-hero. "All I did was take every cornball singing cowboy movie that I'd ever seen and take one piece of equipment off each of these cowboys and put them on the guy," he said. "What I did with him, to almost play it for laughs, was to give him this jazzy circus cowboy suit. I took a piece of practically everybody in the movies at the time—Roy Rogers' pants, Gene Autry's boots, and so on. Then I designed a shirt that looked appropriate for the L.A. Rams! Instead of a mask, I just put a handkerchief over his face, and that was the design."

The first issue was released in 1954. Wildey's illustrative style raised *The Outlaw Kid* Stetson and shoulders above the stampede of similar saddle tramps then proliferating on the newsstands of the 1950s. He took a cinematic approach, mixing photo reference with pen work that suggested a 19th Century etching accented by moody chiaroscuro inking in which the blacks were laid in heavy and with sometimes startling bravado.

Ultimately, *The Outlaw Kid* would prove to be Wildey's most enduring and celebrated mainstream comic book effort. Personally, he later confessed that he didn't enjoy it very much, complaining that the anonymous scripts were all the same.

"It's amazing how many formula stories they got out of *The Outlaw Kid*," Wildey marveled. "It had little variety in it. There had to be at least forty repeat stories of The Outlaw Kid shooting guns out of people's hands. It was straight formula stuff. As a matter of fact, I never read the descriptions at all. I just went by the dialogue. It was so dumb

HE...HE GOT ALL OF THEM!
I STUCK HIS KNIFE IN GROOT LIKE YUH TOLD ME. HE'LL STILL BE HELD FOR MURDER.
BETTER GIVE ME MY MONEY DORSEY.. I'M FIXIN' TO LEAVE FOR MEXICO!

**LEFT: A fine example of Wildey's portrayal of action from "The Hide Butchers," *Eclipse Monthly* #2 (Sep 1983).**

and boring that I just looked at the dialogue and figured out what was happening."

Declining fortunes at Marvel meant that work started drying up around 1957. *The Outlaw Kid* was cancelled. A final Outlaw Kid tale popped up in *Wild Western,* and Wildey tried his hand at Kid Colt a time or two. Although his last stories for Lee appeared in *Gunsmoke Western* and *Wyatt Earp* as late as 1960, Wildey had already gone west, where he hooked up with another comic book fugitive, Alex Toth, on the syndicated *Space Angel* TV cartoon show.

*Space Angel* featured a one-eyed science fiction hero named Scott McCloud. The animation was so limited that real actors mouths were superimposed over the drawn character faces. The Japanese animation technique was called Synchro-Vox.

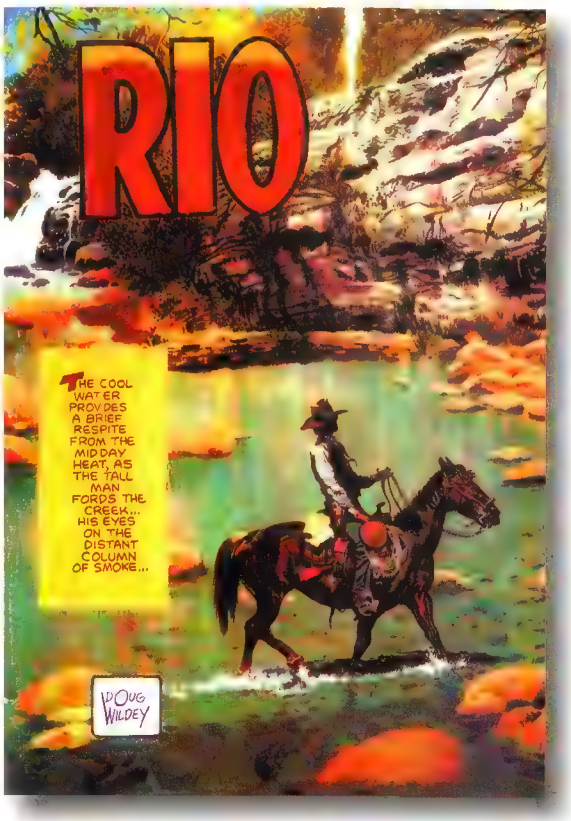
"The animation was nonexistent," Wildey noted. "It was simply well-drawn still figures. Alex Toth carried about 80 percent of the show with his style."

During this period, he was ghosting *The Saint* newspaper strip for artist Bob Lubbers. For one month, he subbed for his idol, Milton Caniff, on *Steve Canyon.*

If you knew where to look, Wildey's distinctive artwork could still be found in comic books. In 1962, the year he left

**continued on page 68**

**BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: The opening pages to Widey's beautiful graphic novel *Rio Rides Again* (Marvel Comics 1990).**


RIO
THE COOL WATER PROVIDES A BRIEF RESPITE FROM THE MIDDAY HEAT, AS THE TALL MAN FORDS THE CREEK... HIS EYES ON THE DISTANT COLUMN OF SMOKE...
DOUG WILDEY

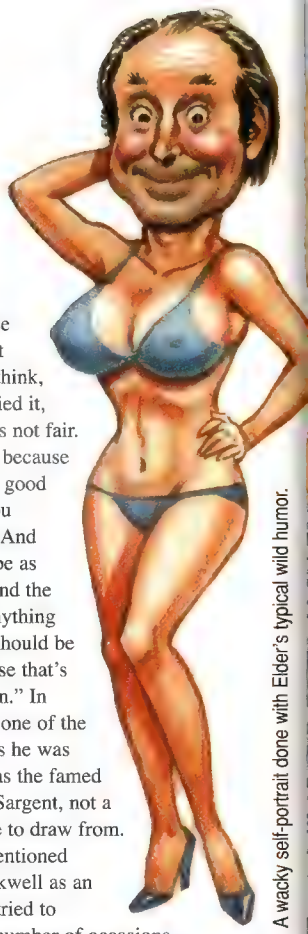
...HE WALKS THE HORSE DOWN THE LITTLE-USED RUTTED ROAD.
SUNLIGHT REFLECTS FROM AN OBJECT IN THE BRUSH...
...INSTANTLY THE GUN CLEARS THE HOLSTER...

# How Will Elder Became the Mad Playboy of Art

## By S.C. Ringgenberg

In the last couple of decades it seems like there's been a Renaissance in appreciating Will Elder's work, aided of course by the publication of two volumes of *Playboy's Annie Fanny* from Dark Horse, and Fantagraphics' recent, lavishly illustrated *Will Elder: The Mad Playboy of Art*, which collected a galaxy of rare and long-unseen Elder artwork in both color and black and white. Frankly, it's high time that Elder was given his due by comic book and humor fans. After all, he's always been one of our best artists.

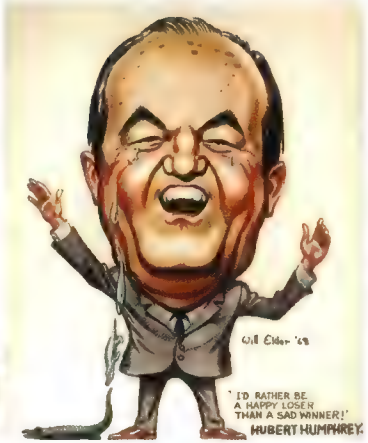
While initially making a big splash in the early issues of *Mad*, Elder then followed Harvey Kurtzman to the lesser-known but still excellent *Trump*, *Humbug*, *Pageant* and *Help* before finally winding up at *Playboy*, where he labored for over a quarter of a century painting the gorgeously watercolored *Little Annie Fanny*. Elder's mastery of watercolors made *Annie Fanny* the most lavish comic strip in history, which was no accident. Elder had been working in watercolors from childhood on. "The first feelings I got towards watercolors was the way it looked so pure on paper. There was a glowing color that attracted me. I guess being a young kid it kind of affects you. You know, you feel you can do everything in that genre. That's pretty much how I got started. I just liked watercolors. It's easy to clean up. It bristles and shines when it's freshly put down on paper." Developing the technique Elder used on *Annie* required a combination of "…training and experience. Of course, I've discovered something in the meantime, an electric eraser. You're not supposed to rub watercolor. It's down permanently. But if you get an electric eraser, you can hit a highlight here and a highlight there, there a highlight. I sound like a song…Well, that's what I do…I get the best watercolors. You don't work cheap because it doesn't pay. You want to start with the best. And if you can, you can copy…because copying is a way to teach yourself how to do things without being dependent on someone else. In fact, copying is like going to a library and looking up a book or a story or another book. Because you learn that way. People think, well you copied it, you know, it's not fair. Fair nothing, because you're not as good as the guy you copied from. And you want to be as good as he, and the fact is that anything that is good should be copied because that's how you learn." In Elder's case, one of the watercolorists he was looking at was the famed John Singer Sargent, not a bad influence to draw from. Elder also mentioned Norman Rockwell as an artist he has tried to imitate on a number of occasions.



A wacky self-portrait done with Elder's typical wild humor.

As the early '60s stretched into the '70s and then became the '80s, Elder's quiet excellence on *Annie* became almost a given. *Annie* would appear in *Playboy*

Elder's talents extend beyond his "chicken fat" style and pretty girls to include dead-on caricatures of politicians. Here, LBJ, HHH and RMN.



a couple of times a year and that's almost the only place where you'd see Will Elder's art. I think it would be fair to say that many of the people reading *Playboy* probably didn't connect Will Elder with the brilliantly zany lunatic cartoonist who illustrated *Starchie*, *Darnold Duck*, *Poopeye*, *Ping-Pong*, *Manduck the Magician, Captain Izzy and Washt Upps*, *Lil' Melvin* and many others in the pages of *Mad* and *Panic* to such devastating effect on the cumulative funny bones of America's teens, college kids and intellectuals. In those early EC parodies, and in his later, slicker work for *Trump*, Elder honed his skills as a mimic not just for the sake of mimicry, but always in the service of the story. "...If you don't do it, your gag has lost its strength. The fact is that you have more of an impact on the gag if you mimic the artist's style, because not to do that would weaken the whole procedure. So, the best way to get humor out of anything is to fool the public to think that, look, this is Mickey Rodent. This is certainly, it can't be anything else but, but it has been everything else but. That's what makes it funnier."

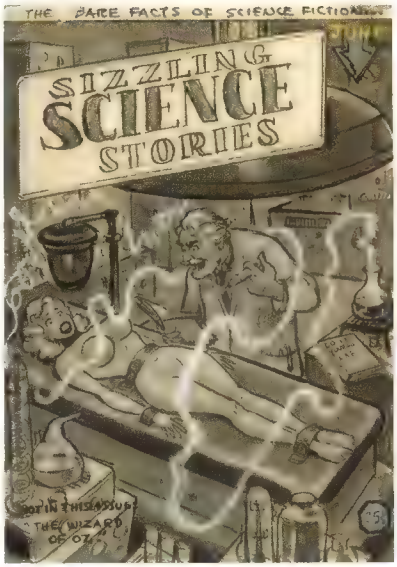
Elder's art for *Annie* boasted such rich, saturated colors that even other artists were fooled by how he achieved it. "I was asked, 'Is that an airbrush you have there?' Of course, you know, you took advantage of the fact that an airbrush can do what a plain old brush can't do. But that's not true. I worked at that for years to get that nice, smooth seamless quality in my work, but it takes patience. You have to do things that are not normally accepted by watercolorists and that is never go over the watercolors twice or three times. Keep it fresh. Actually, that's a lot of baloney. I think if you get the results, no one asks how you got it. They just see it laying there, looking radiant as ever."

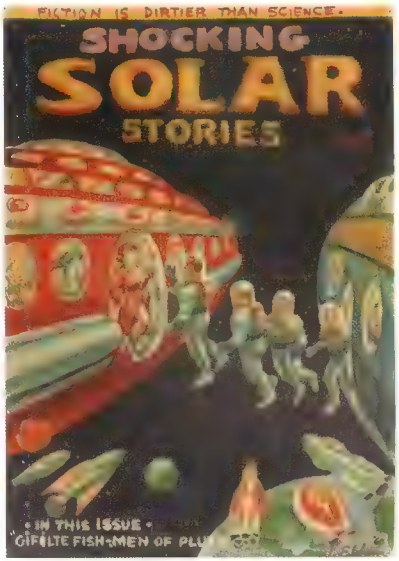
In a way, *Annie*'s success led to a kind of forced anonymity for Elder. He was so busy drawing and painting that he didn't go to conventions for decades, unlike the garrulous and opinionated Kurtzman, who was a fixture on the comic convention circuit for years. In recalling those days in an interview conducted in late 2003, Elder said, "I hate to use this cliché, but I was busy working. I wasn't going on the hustings and trying to promote myself. Of course, I like that, but I would spend too much time away from my drawing board and I'm a slow worker, deliberately slow. And I've found that staying home and doing your job pays off in the end."

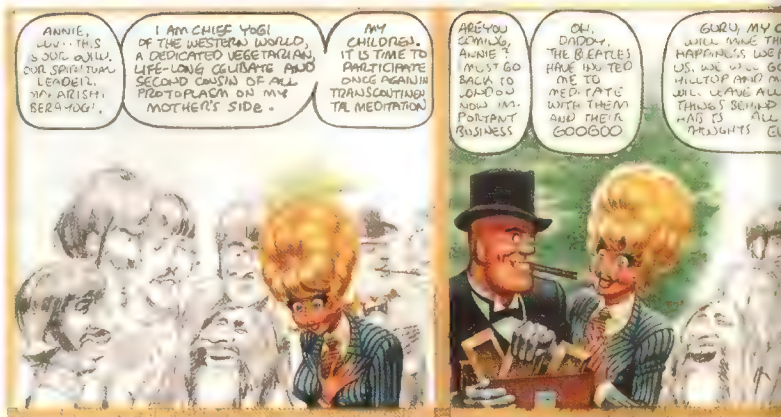
This Norman Rockwell-esque scene (typically twisted by Elder's sense of humor) is a rough for the planned cover of the unpublished **Trump** #3.

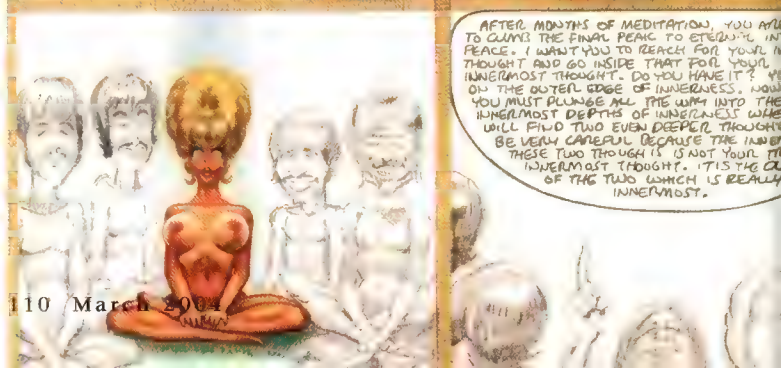
But it's not like Elder dropped out of sight. His work was appearing in *Playboy* throughout its glory years in the '60s and '70s. It was more that Elder's comic genius and genuine skill as a watercolorist were taken for granted. Elder painted the strip so elegantly, and took innocent, dumb, desirable Annie through her paces so efficiently that he made it look easy, which it wasn't. "Nothing came naturally," Elder admits ruefully. "It always comes naturally after the fact. I always worked very hard at trying to achieve a certain quality in my work. And after achieving it, I can say, 'Well, it was easier than I thought.' But it wasn't." As he's said, Elder worked very slowly, laying down his watercolors as

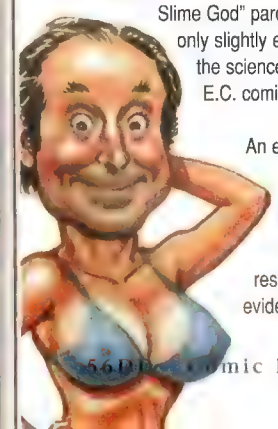
*[continued on page 57]*




ANNIE, LUV... THIS IS JUST A LIL' DOP SPIRITUAL LEADER'S MAHARISHI BERA-YOGI.
I AM CHIEF YOGI OF THE WESTERN WORLD, A DEDICATED VEGETARIAN LIFE-LONG CELIBATE AND SECOND COUSIN OF ALL PROTOPLASM ON MY MOTHER'S SIDE.
MY CHILDREN, IT IS TIME TO PARTICIPATE ONCE AGAIN IN TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION
ARE YOU COMING, ANNIE? I MUST GO BACK TO LONDON NOW. IMPORTANT BUSINESS
OH, DADDY, THE BEATLES HAVE INVITED ME TO MEDITATE WITH THEM AND THEY'RE GOOGOO
GURU, MY O... WILL MAKE TH... HAPPINESS LAST... US. WE WILL GO... HILLTOP AND M... WILL LEAVE ALL... THINGS BEHIND... HAD IS ALL... THOUGHTS


AFTER MONTHS OF MEDITATION, YOU ARE TO CLIMB THE FINAL PEAK TO ETERNAL IN... PEACE. I WANT YOU TO REACH FOR YOUR M... THOUGHT AND GO INSIDE THAT FOR YOUR... INNERMOST THOUGHT. DO YOU HAVE IT? Y... ON THE OUTER EDGE OF INNERNESS. NOW... YOU MUST PLUNGE ALL THE WAY INTO THE... INNERMOST DEPTHS OF INNERNESS WHE... WILL FIND TWO EVEN DEEPER THOUGHT... BE VERY CAREFUL BECAUSE THE INN... THESE TWO THOUGHTS IS NOT YOUR TR... INNERMOST THOUGHT. IT IS THE O... OF THE TWO WHICH IS REALLY... INNERMOST.



Elder's illustrations for **Playboy**'s "Girls for the Slime God" parody (Nov 1960) were only slightly exaggerated versions of the science fiction stories he did for E.C. comics.

An example of Elder collaborating with Jack Davis on an unfinished **Annie Fanny** panel. The differences in their respective styles are very evident here.

***Bill Elder***

*[continued from page 55]*

...glazes. And glazes'll work for you if you don't hurry. You can't hurry when you have watercolor. There are times when you don't have the feeling of glazing. You've got to be pretty good at it. You have to have put in those years of experience knowing exactly what to expect when you put down a color."

In the mid-'60s, when *Annie* was appearing most frequently, almost every other issue, and in some of her longest stories, some of them up to six pages, the volume of work was too much for even the talented Elder to do and have a hope of making his deadlines. So, Elder and Kurtzman would call on some of their friends to help with the art and writing, usually their old EC cronies like Russ Heath, Jack Davis and Frank Frazetta. Occasionally they would call on artists Arnold Roth, Al Jaffee and Paul Coker, and writer Larry Siegel. Heath was one of their most frequent collaborators, contributing enough that he even signed several of the strips and was featured as one of the creative team in one of the Christmas-themed strips that included portraits of Elder, Kurtzman, publisher Hugh Hefner and Heath in the last panel. Heath was an excellent choice as an assistant as his slick, realistic style meshed nicely with Elder's lushly cartooned realism. Of his collaborators, Elder notes that they "learned fast because they are good. I would say that it's pretty much the same thing that I went through. If there's a job to be done, try to get as fresh a color as you can. But the main thing is, don't mix your colors. You've got to use a palatte for a watercolor. I mean the palattes should be as clear as the color involved, you know. And never put this to paper unless you know for sure how the outcome will be."

Jack Davis, a frequent collaborator in the '60s had such a distinctive style that integrating his work into Annie presented Elder with a unique challenge as far as maintaining the strip's lushly rendered look. "Davis is a terrific cartoonist, but the thing is, it wasn't exactly a cartoon that they were looking for. It was an illustration in a sense in a cartoon ambience. The thing is you've got to get the drawing to look like an illustration. These are little paintings, like a Persian miniaturist. Someone once mentioned that about the Persian miniatures. It's very true. Your work should resemble something more refined than a cartoon. Not to say that a cartoon isn't desirable, but it's nothing to do with the story. Because Annie has to look realistic. She has a lot of voluptuous qualities about her, and you can't shortchange that."

By the '80s, *Annie* began appearing less and less frequently, and Elder's art started showing up again in one of his oldest markets, *Mad*. Working, as usual, with Kurtzman, Elder brought his painting and drawing talents to bear on something besides lush nudity and sexual innuendoes. Throughout much of his adult career, Elder was overshadowed by his more famous and gregarious companion. Now that Kurtzman's passed on and Elder is no longer slaving in relative obscurity on *Annie Fanny*, he has come into his own. And Will Elder's work deserves a serious reappraisal. He's not just Kurtzman's loyal and hilarious sideman. He deserves to be acknowledged for the amazingly gifted watercolor painter that he has evolved into, something for which he's never quite gotten the accolades commensurate with his talents.

Elder's luminous flesh tones and beautifully rendered sight gags made *Annie Fanny* a visual treat every time it appeared. In its last years, that was all too seldom, as Harvey Kurtzman's health deteriorated and *Playboy* cut back on Annie's frequency. The only positive about all this was that it forced Elder to look for other markets and get his work out somewhere beyond *Playboy*'s aging and shrinking readership.

In an interview originally conducted for *Heavy Metal* magazine, Elder gave this appraisal of his *Annie* pages: "The originals actually glow like a gem. They really glow beautifully...compared to the reproductions. In fact, some of the old *Playboy* magazines I still have, I look at those pages and some of them glow. They're luminescent, the color. It quite surprises me. Their reproduction system was superior."

Now in the twilight of his career, I asked Elder if there was some project he wished he had gotten to as a painter. He replied, "I would like to be a portrait painter and a painter in general ... when I would get serious, at quiet moments in my life, and lately there have been quite a few of those, I like to paint. I've picked up every trick of the trade in what I've been doing with *Annie*, and with other paint jobs, you know when I did lampoons of some of the commercials, some of the agency ads. People thought I had an airbrush; I never did. Some of these ads on Phillip Morris, beer ads, some of those things, paintings...(the) Norman Rockwell (parody). I busted my hump on that one, but it paid off.... Actually, it was very difficult trying to get a Rockwell, and as busy as that Rockwell was, it was a tremendous task. But it was challenging. I said every time I put a brushstroke down, I thought, I've got to go on...I have to salute Norman Rockwell because he was a wonderful craftsman...I got him down in spirit, but that's one of my favorites. That was a watercolor."

Surprisingly, given the skillful work on display in *Will Elder: The Mad Playboy of Art*, Elder didn't come to oil painting until relatively late in life. "I did oils when I was about forty years old. That's a number of years ago, but I kind of rather went for the watercolor because it's a much cleaner medium for me at least, I'm thinking of myself. And it's easy to wash up, clean up, all the nasty things that go on working in paint that you never see. All you ever see is something hanging in a frame."

If you've never seen Will Elder paint, or you know his work only from old *Mad* reprints in paperback form, I urge you to run, not walk, to your nearest comics shop and get copies of both *Playboy's Little Annie Fanny* volumes and *Will Elder: The Mad Playboy of Art*. Volumes I and II of *Annie Fanny* are available at www.darkhorse.com, while you can purchase *Will Elder: The Mad Playboy of Art* directly from the Fantagraphics web site at www.fantagraphics.com. Will Elder's son-in-law, Gary Vandenberg, maintains a nifty Will Elder web site at **http://members.aol.com/gvtv923/** where you can order these books, Will Elder prints and tour a Will Elder gallery.

***John K. Snyder III***

*[continued from page 28]*

**Baker**: Are you using more brushwork in your inking these days?

**Snyder**: Yeah, I am. I inked a few issues of *Justice League Adventures*—which was a nice change of pace for me, because it was in the animation style—and I did a *lot* of that in brush. That was a *great* experience for me. The stories and the pencils were terrific, and it was a nice change of pace to work in a pared-down style. My daughters got a kick out of it too—they love the show!

**Baker**: What about other inking implements? Are there any particular pens or nibs you prefer using?

**Snyder**: There's a new pen out that's fantastic. Faber Castell has a new series of artist pens called the Pitt Artist Pen. The ink is very, very dense. It dries just like India ink, and they have a brush pen that is the nicest brush pen I've ever come across. It's terrific for inking. And I use Japanese Sumi ink to fill in my blacks.

**Baker**: What about pencils? Do you use a traditional pencil?

**Snyder**: I should, but I tend to use mechanical pencils. There's not as much fluidity in the pencil stroke, but I tend to deal with a lot of detail in terms of cityscapes or machinery, and I find that it's good to get in that information with a fine point pencil. And you don't have to constantly sharpen it. [Laughter] So I tend to lean towards that, though I'm looking to experiment with that a little more in the future.

**Baker**: You said that you liked to keep your pages fairly clean. How do you keep it that way, and do you use a certain type of eraser to keep it clean?

**Snyder**: Well, actually, I tape off the page—tape off the borders—and… You can walk into my working area, and it will look like a bomb had hit. [General laughter] There's reference materials, there's pencils, brushes, jars of water with paint and everything *all* over the place. But right at the center of it is this clean area with the page. Sometimes I am not aware of the environment around me—I'm completely focused in on the page—and it tends to have this protective aura around it.

But, unfortunately, with paint the way it is, and ink the way it is, as clean as I'd *like* it to be, it does tend to get very messy. And there's always correction tape, and white tape, to clean up the borders with. But to me, if the page is clean and the area around it is safe, then the room isn't messy. Everything's great, you know? [General laughter]

One artist whose work has always struck me was John Berkey, a famous movie poster artist, painter, and illustrator. He did the *Towering Inferno* movie poster, the *King Kong* remake movie poster. A fantastic artist. His style is very loose—to get back to the photo realism thing, again—he's a perfect example; he conveys a sense of reality, yet his work is *nearly* impressionistic. And he is one of my favorite illustrators. I saw a shot of him working in his office, and he mixes his own paint. He has little jars, they're meticulously in a row, his working area is impeccably clean, yet his work is almost…it's got this frenzied, kind of harried, expressionistic [look]. All the action is right there on the illustration, but all around him everything's almost spotless. So workspace varies with each individual artist.

**Baker**: Do you listen to music or turn the TV on while you work, or do you prefer there to be no distractions around you during that time?

**Snyder**: It really depends on where I'm at with a piece. Sometimes I can sit down and have some background noise and get so involved that I completely forget and I'm kind of wrapped up in the whole project. And then there are other times where [I can't have it in the background]. I used to almost exclusively listen to almost nothing but music. But, like I said, I'll get so involved with it sometimes, I'll have talk radio on and I'll ignore it. It'll just be background noise. I find myself listening more and more these days to classical music, classical radio stations, and I'll have the TV in the background—but facing *away* from me. [General laughter] But I'll tend to have on Turner Classic Movies, and have this old movie dialogue going on in the background, too. Again, it's something I don't really focus on. It's background noise. I like to have some piece of art work in front of me, such as a Leyendecker poster or an old movie poster, just for inspiration; outside of that, the less distraction the better.

**Baker**: What are you working on at present, or might have in the pipeline?

**Snyder**: Let's see, I just finished up doing a series of covers for *Grendel*. It was a run that Matt Wagner and I worked on together, the last one of which I believe came out this past December [2003]. I also did a recreation of *Hulk* #1 from the 1960s, for the 34th *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* cover. I'm doing a *Vampirella* cover for Harris, as well as a revamp of my old series, *Fashion in Action*.

**Baker**: I was just going to ask about that series, and if we'd ever get to see it again. For those who missed it the first time, why don't you give us a quick outline of that book?

**Snyder**: *Fashion in Action* was a back up feature in Timothy Truman's *Scout*. And it's a celebrity protection agency that's all women. Now I need to specify that this was some time ago, before *VIP* and *Danger Girl* and the like. At the time, there wasn't anything else like it. I'm happy to see—eventually, it had to happen—women are now accepted as action characters just like men are; that's a *great* development. Sometimes it's done very well, and sometimes it's done very badly, just like it is with male characters.

The key to *Fashion in Action* was I wanted to use all types of different women. I didn't want all one body type, not the same personality because, you know, women are different, too. [Laughter] They have different personalities, different shapes, different

sizes, and that was a key element of what I was trying to get across.

It's a combination of several things: it's action, it's fashion, it's clearly tongue in cheek, and it's a lot of fun. I've always been asked when I'm going to return to it, and I now feel very comfortable with bringing it back. It seems like a good time for it, and I'm ready to give it a new perspective, and a new angle. It's very exciting to be working on it again. I'm in a good place, creatively, to go back and give a whole new look to it, and do all the things that I *wanted* to do when I initially started it, but I wasn't quite as good at the time, to be honest with you. [Laughter] I've had people come up to me and say, "That was really one of the first books of its kind." And I'm just happy to see that there's such a big [potential audience for it].

**Baker**: Are you planning on doing everything on *Fashion in Action*?

**Snyder**: I'm putting together a team on that, and we're still developing it at this time. I'll be spearheading the whole project, and it will be a collaborative effort. We've just started putting together the character designs and started hammering out the plot.

**Baker**: Might we get to see reprints of the original run, as well?

**Snyder**: I have to wait and see. Right now, what's important is getting out the new version. I think that, once we get that out, if there's demand for it, then I would like to put [the original run] together—maybe in one volume. I do have almost *all* of the original art. It won't be any trouble to reprint at all.

**Baker**: Are there any characters or titles, whether they're company or creator owned, that you're dying to work on?

**Snyder**: I'm open to a lot of different characters. I would have to say, going back to the beginning of our conversation, to when I was a kid and some of the things that first got me interested in comics, I absolutely *loved* Batman and the Fantastic Four. It was a blast to do the recreation of the cover of *Fantastic Four* #1 for the 31st edition of the *Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*. So, both Batman and the Fantastic Four, I'd love to handle them in one way or another. I'd also like to return to working with the revision that Matt Wagner and I did of Dr. Mid-Nite for DC Comics.

I've always been fascinated by the mystical characters that are in both [universes of the "Big Two"] companies, which over at Marvel would be Doctor Strange, Warlock, Thanos and Captain Marvel. That otherworldly, partial science fiction/partial magic and mysticism universe. And then, over at DC, I've always been fascinated by the Spectre and Phantom Stranger and Dr. Fate. Again, these characters really lend themselves to be painted, because you've got the spells, the time portals, mists and that sort of thing. These all interpret very well into painting, and I think that it's something that could be very powerful.

**Baker**: What do you get from doing the work, be it professionally or personally?

**Snyder**: I can't lie. It's very exciting when the box of copies comes in, and I can hand them out to friends and family and it's your work, or it's work you've done with other people. And when you think it's come out great, then it's a terrific feeling. There's a lot of satisfaction in that. It's something that you've done, and there's something special to creating something. When the printing is right, and the pages are in order, and the story works and really, most importantly, when you go to a convention or a shop and people come up and say, "Hey, I really enjoyed that story"—again, let me emphasis "enjoyed that *story*"—or, "I loved the way you did this page, and I love the way the character looks," you see that somebody has *really* gotten some enjoyment and some entertainment out of it, *that's* the real satisfaction there. It's great to do it, but on the other hand, when you get that reaction from people, and you can tell that they *really*, thoroughly enjoyed the story, that's just a great feeling. Because you feel like you've succeeded. When you do this stuff, you're cooped up and alone, so when you get it out there and get that reaction, it's really nice to see that a connection has been made.

And that's one thing that's really important to me. Because I know, especially these painted projects, these books aren't cheap, and I always feel like it's important to give the readers their money's worth—and more. I am pretty particular about that, because they're expensive and you definitely want the readers to feel like they've gotten something extra for putting out that extra money for that book. So there's a lot of satisfaction when someone comes up and says, "I loved that!" That's great, because you feel like you did your job, you know? [General laughter]

**Baker**: Do you have a website where interested readers can get updates on your work?

**Snyder**: You know what? I'm behind on this one. I've got to catch up with the 21st Century. [Laughter] I've noticed *so* many people have them. As I continue to put together *Fashion in Action*, I'm going to take steps to get that started. One thing I find about having a website—I've taken a look at a lot of them—once you make that commitment to put up a site, you've got to maintain it, and need to answer people's questions and get on it on a regular basis.

So it's a big commitment when you make that decision. I can see where you can get a website set up and leave it dormant. It's almost like a rerun, you know? [General laughter] So once you start, you've got to stay on top of it. In 2004, I am going to be taking a hard look at putting that together.

**Baker**: Anything else you'd like to add?

**Snyder**: As I said, I've got more painted covers and books to do. I've got some new projects out there that I can't talk about yet, unfortunately, but I am looking forward to doing both paint and black and white work in the future. And, again, I *wish* I could tell you more, but I can't just yet. [General laughter]

**Ross**

**continued from page 41**

on it that says they wouldn't hate each other. There is that whole thing of the *World's Finest* team as far as the two friends.

**CBM**: Jeph Loeb is certainly doing some of that in the new Superman/Batman comic.

**Ross**: Right, but he's doing that to the intent of that as well.

**CBM**: Whose idea was it to have Batman pulling out the .45 because that was like a throwback to the old Bob Kane/Bill Finger days?

**Ross**: That would be mine. Chip's idea was the whole thing with Superman bursting through the *Daily Planet* symbol on the building. I was always having trouble with the story to begin with because I told Chip that I was somewhat reticent about starting it before we had even planned out the story because I knew I had my *Justice League* book I was working on. This was around October of 2002. I had just started *Justice League* and I was going to have to start on the first pages of this new Batman/Superman story, and when we were discussing what it should be I said, "Don't give me a lot of crap with lots of buildings in the background." And, of course, the first idea he's got is about Superman bursting through the top of the most famous Metropolis building and thereby making my life miserable. But as we sat down to examine it and work out the nuts and bolts of the story, I couldn't deny the power that I thought that story might hold in terms of just overall fun, and especially that first image. In fact, the story almost existed for no other reason than to justify the in-your-face quality of the first page. Because the idea of Superman doing that to the *Daily Planet* logo and then Batman subsequently holding a gun are two things that are meant to be tantalizing to get you wondering what the hell's going on. My idea with the gun... I can't remember what Chip's first suggestion for what we have Batman intending to do, but knowing that he wanted to have Batman potentially taking on Superman with some kind of Kryptonite projectile, I just thought here's a perfect way to scratch another itch of mine I've never been able to do which is Batman with a gun like in the '30s or '40s. That very short-lived period where he did have a gun. Sure enough it did wind up being one of those things we almost got in trouble for that almost got edited out.

**CBM**: It is a throwback to the pulp days. Your work has that feeling of the old pulp covers, and that image of him with the gun in the holster is a throwback to the Shadow. I was surprised when I read it that it got past the DC editors, but it's wonderful.

**Ross**: Just barely. It almost didn't. The thing is

**Detail of Batman firing his pistol from the first page of *Mythology's World's Finest* story. Note the similarity in Batman's position, choice of gun and Ross' painting style to The Shadow pulp cover by George Rozen.**

**Page 3 from *Mythology's World's Finest* story.**

that the work was already done and it almost got nipped at the last second when somebody woke up. We were able to negotiate all the finer points out of that problem luckily, but that could have been a complete disaster for the story. The thing is that a lot of people are trying to do stories where Batman is using a gun, including people making the movies—they want to give Batman a gun. DC is always trying to protect him against that being intruded upon his character. The story's a bit of a cheat in that way, but luckily they allowed this indulgence.

**CBM**: The title of the book is *Mythology* and your work has a larger than life feel to it, but what I've always noticed about your work is how beautifully subtle it is. With a slight turn of the head, a clenched first, or a character's posture, or even a perceived emotion…you seem to work hard at that. The work is in your face, it's larger than life, but there's a real subtlety to it too.

**Ross**: Well, every single way that the lighting works upon the object you're looking at—particularly the human being you're looking at—every single way that the head is tilted, that the direction of where they body is pointed, every limb, it's all important to convey the emotion or feeling. And by each and every single shift in that shape it conveys a different feeling, and I have to understand my own unconscious appreciation of these feelings to be able to find whatever it is I need to communicate. The simplest thing is hands open to hand clenched as to what kind of different meanings those convey, what feelings they convey to the viewer. So there's a ton of storytelling in each and every image.

**CBM**: The current, and seeming welcome, trend at DC is for major writers and artists to take their stab at popular characters in the monthly books. Is there any chance that you're going to do this?

**Ross**: There's a good chance of it. There's something I'm developing for DC that would be a more regular product, like a bi-monthly product where I can achieve a more frequent schedule with publication and having something out there for the fans that's more what they like.

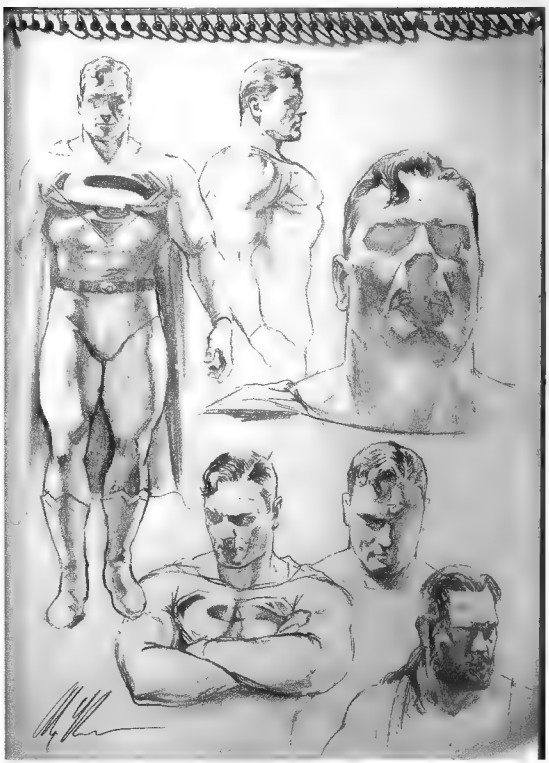
**CBM**: Are you going to continue to work in the gouache or are you going to work in the traditional method?

**Ross**: I want to basically use what is considered my best asset at this point and that would be gouache. The key thing is that you finally get again something that looks like the kind of stuff I've done for the high-end publications, but hopefully get it for a cheaper price. And then it can hopefully reach more people that way.

**CBM**: Is this something that will be coming out in 2004?

**Ross**: The hope is that we will be able to hit sometime by the end of the year.

**CBM**: The *Liberty and Justice* book is the last of the large books, and you're using the old Justice League. Did DC give you a hard time about using them?



**Superman sketches for *Kingdom Come*.**

WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE SOCIAL BALANCE WE HOLD IS A DELICATE ONE. FREEDOM AND ORDER ARE IDEALS THAT ARE OFTEN IN OPPOSITION. WHILE TRYING TO MAINTAIN ONE, THE OTHER MAY SUFFER.
AND YESTERDAY, WHILE TRYING TO MAINTAIN BOTH, WE WERE FORCED TO TAKE EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES AGAINST ORDINARY PEOPLE. HAD THERE BEEN ANY OTHER OPTION, WE WOULD HAVE TAKEN IT, BUT WE DID WHAT WE FELT WAS NECESSARY TO SAFEGUARD

**Superman and the JLA convene and address the United Nations during the finale of *JLA: Liberty and Justice*.**

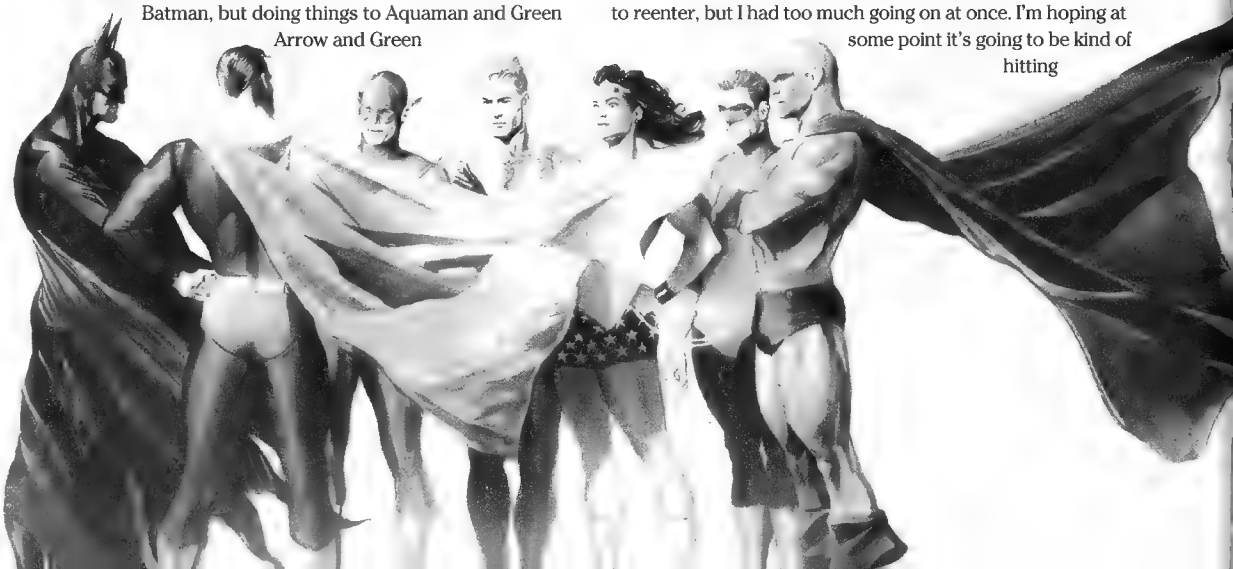
**Ross**: Not at all. They didn't seem to have any issues with the particular era I was representing or any issues regarding any kind of sense of imbalance between, oh, here I have the classic JLA but I'm also showing you things like Aquaman's son is still alive in this. So, in a way, it's sort of in a purity aspect of their history where everything is just so before. Styles of writing would have to bring in such a huge amount of tragedy in everybody's lives like Iris Allen being killed or Firestorm being made a member of the team.

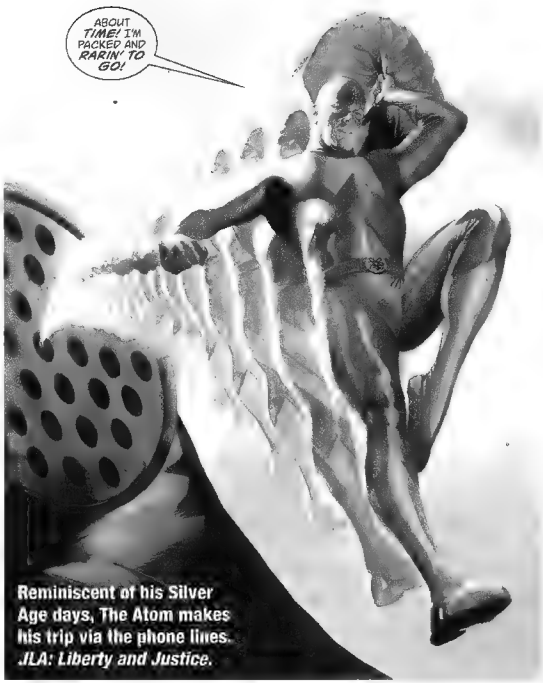
**CBM**: In talking to Neal Adams the one thing that angered him the most was the idea that DC was killing off or radically changing, not the main-level characters like Superman and Batman, but doing things to Aquaman and Green Arrow and Green Lantern especially. He was just so absolutely appalled by it. So I think it's just great that you're using this, and maybe, hopefully, this will be a signal to DC and they'll know that the readers want what they grew up with and what the tradition of these characters should be.

**Ross**: Well, the reason they're open to this kind of thing at the moment is that the old stuff that was carrying on the heritage of the Byrne revamp and all the things that had been such a very tightly-focused reborn DC continuity isn't showing to the degree it had been. So they are open to seeing what people are willing to buy more. Like resurrecting *Green Arrow* with Kevin Smith was just the case of, "Hey, when we got this creator and people are ready to read it finally, we'll give you that guy back." The same might be true for Barry Allen one day. Given a case of the fans and if they really want something or are open to it, they're going to give it a shot. They're no longer considering their opinion as law. They know they have to change a little bit just to see where people are buying things.

**CBM**: With your uncompromising approach and your tremendous body of work, are you concerned about burning out?

**Ross**: Sure. I'm absolutely concerned about that. I had a really tough year with doing the work for this book as well as the work for the new *Justice League* book. I was running on empty most of the time, and I didn't work all that seriously at the end of the year after I finished *JLA*. It's been a weird kind of feeling just to come off of this incredible burnout. I know I have to reenter, but I had too much going on at once. I'm hoping at some point it's going to be kind of hitting





Reminiscent of his Silver Age days, The Atom makes his trip via the phone lines. *JLA: Liberty and Justice.*

some kind of plateau where I can lose myself into a work. When I was doing things like Marvels and *Kingdom Come* I didn't have all the freelance gigs in the world, so I was finally focused on those projects. And everything I had to give was right in there. These days I'll have multiple images to choose from as far as covers and prints and whatnot that could occupy my time and take a lot of my ambition from the work that would be my regular day-to-day focus.

**CBM**: Are you going to cut out some of that stuff if you're going to do the regular bi-monthly book?

**Ross**: Probably just keep it to a leaner number of things, but it's always hard if you get a lot of offers for things that seem like a good idea to take on. The curse and the blessing of my career has been to have terrific opportunities to work on certain things that I had always imagined it would be great to have a chance to work on—doing certain kind of re-creation images or a chance to work on a cover for this or that collection of material that it would be an honor to be a part of. All those opportunities and more have come to me. At a certain point, you get to say, "Wait a minute. I've already done this before." I turned down doing a cover to a trade paperback of something that would be similar to material I've already done. I thought, "Let me just turn it down. I'm not inspired by the thought of it. To hell with it." I've got plenty of things to look forward to that I'm inspired by that are on the page to be done.

**CBM**: Is there a particular comic or storyline that you'll pull out more often than anything else for inspiration, or for entertainment purposes? Not necessarily of yours, but of someone else's, whether anything from your childhood or now.

**Ross**: Boy, I'm not sure if I can say one thing exactly. Whenever I have a chance to pull out something by Neal Adams or John Romita, I find myself still thinking about that stuff as a certain level of human perfection. I think I either want to find some element [of that] to inspire the work I'm doing or try to absorb something in the design, approach, or whatnot, or just something for the sake of enjoying it for its own work of just being a wonderful finished object. I think particularly with Adams being the realist that he is there's still so much there that I have yet to rip off. [Laughter] So many poses, so many kinds of ways of looking at a scene, so many things that I could be doing with covers that I've never tried. There are a lot of traps that I can fall into by doing the same compositions over and over again, and I need to learn from that and move beyond it. It is tough, and that's where burnout also comes into play because you do too much of any particular thing and then you're just repeating yourself.

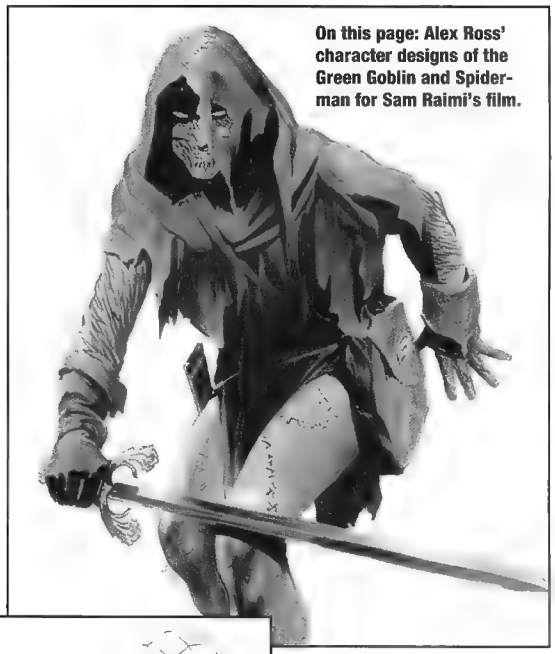
MY LAST DEED BEFORE DYING WAS TO SUMMON HECTOR HALL JORDAN, AND BESTOW MY RING UPON THE MAN WHO WOULD ONE DAY BECOME THE GREATEST GREEN LANTERN OF ALL.
**A panel from Ross and Dini's origin of Green Lantern.**

**CBM**: I thought your designs for the *Spider-Man* movie were wonderful…

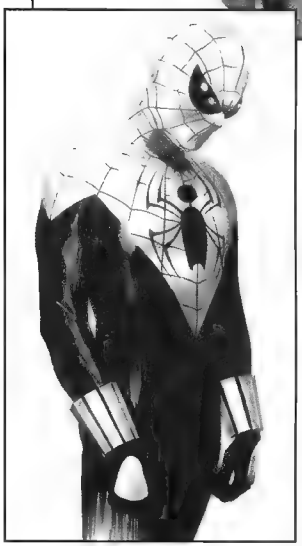
**Ross**: Thank you.

**CBM**: … And after seeing the film—I enjoyed it, but I really wish they had used what you did, especially for the Green Goblin. I'm sure you've heard that before, but you gave him more of a horror movie look like the old Universal horror films. What was your feeling about the finished film?

**Ross**: I hate the finished



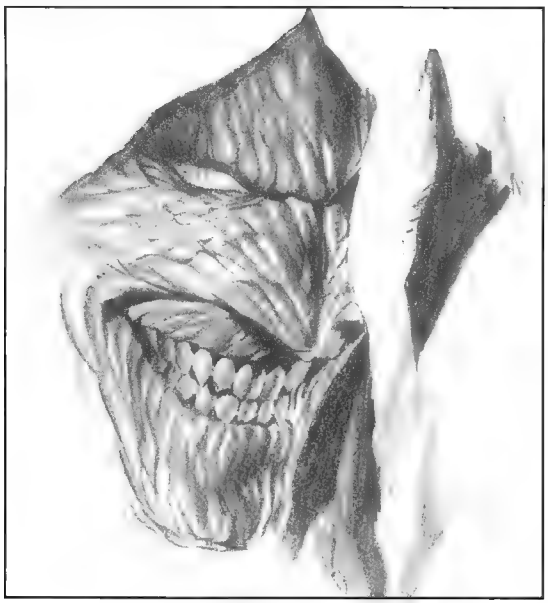
**On this page: Alex Ross' character designs of the Green Goblin and Spider-man for Sam Raimi's film.**

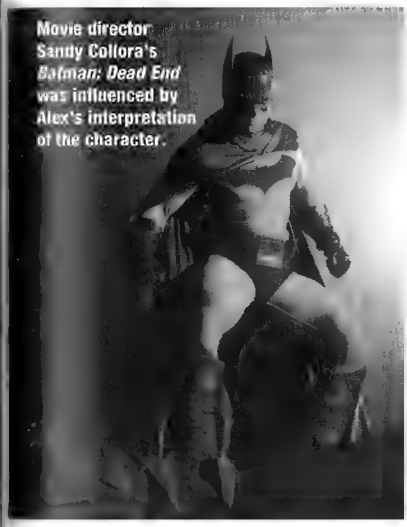


film. I do want to like this kind of thing because I like the actors that were chosen—they're good actors. Certainly, when you've got Willem Defoe you've got the best you're going to get, and then you're going to cover his head up with an unmoving mask. Everybody talked about how that was unforgivable. In a weird way what they designed in the movie kind of looked like a John Romita drawing frozen in some weird aspects. It was a good physical design, but it wasn't good for what the movie could have used at that point. The movie could have used a character that had a lot more interactivity with it. I think they made a misstep with a project like this when they immediately went to the Green Goblin when they could have used any number of secondary-type villains to make a decent film introducing us to this character instead of juxtaposing him with *his* Joker or his sort-of opposite number villain, which was completely worthless and wasted on a character like Spider-Man who that doesn't really apply to.

**CBM**: The great thing about the old Green Goblin with Norman Osborn was the personal relationship that he had, that it was all personal between him and Peter Parker. Like you said, that couldn't be built up into another film—started in the first film and move on to another one. I thought the character's design looked like a Japanese toy, and I have the feeling that they were just trying to promote and sell a toy.

**Ross**: Yeah, and obviously the thing that I concocted was a lot more for the aesthetic of seeming horrifying and actually more Goblin-like. What I did looks like one of the goblins out of *Lord of the Rings*, which, whenever I see that film and the dark green goblin creatures come up, I think, "That's what it should have looked like." That would have been *terrific*. You could have just taken that whole costume and dirtied it up in that way where he *would have* looked like he fit into a Peter Jackson film. It would have just been perfect for the character, but I don't think they had the same level of vision in the production of that movie; I think a relatively sloppy movie was made and it's not the same quality as what the *X-Men* films have been. Here is this enormously successful thing, but I think the main reason that *Spider-Man* was successful and popular with people is that for the first time for the better part of America they finally *got* what Spider-Man *was*, as a concept and as a source of excitement and entertainment and wish-fulfillment. The idea of running around New York City in this costume with the powers he has, the ability to swing from building to building, the sheer joy that that would embody, they can finally see—even with the computer effect—they see the concept. I think that for most of us reading comics who can actually make that creative leap just from looking at the two-dimensional image, it was no great thing. We can be much





Movie director Sandy Collora's *Batman: Dead End* was influenced by Alex's interpretation of the character.

more critical of it because we *already* believed in Spider-Man. We already got the idea because it was very three-dimensional in our brains. In a way the movie had a lot more to live up to for us, but for the rest of the world who had never been shown anything of Spider-Man aside for a cartoon that would make them believe in, not the reality of the character, but more just the greatness and the fun that this character embodies.

**CBM**: I think it's a missed opportunity. Like I said, I saw your initial designs before the film came out and I had heard that they were rejected, but I thought they were wonderful. I thought the Green Goblin was great—I'm a big fan of the old horror movies so he was perfect.

**Ross**: A friend of mine actually designed the Spider-Man costume that I was kind of shepherding in to the studio. I always thought that it was a brilliant way of thinking a way around the fact that if Spider-Man was crawling up walls and everything his hands and feet would be black as soot from all the dirty buildings he would be touching every day. It's a logical thing you don't think about commonly, but if you're going to be out there, especially swinging around in New York air up that high, you're going to be a pretty dirty-looking guy.

**CBM**: Exactly. Leave it to you who is always thinking of these characters coming to life to think of something like that.

**Ross**: It's a certain thing that starts to sink in, then you realize that, yeah, he'd be bright red for about the first six hours of the day maybe, but if he's out there much longer than that he's going to be just filthy. The costume might never wash all of it away.

**CBM**: Especially the Romita comics where he's in London, which is even worse than New York City. What did you think of the Sandy Colores' *Batman: Dead End*? He seemed to draw a lot of inspiration from you.

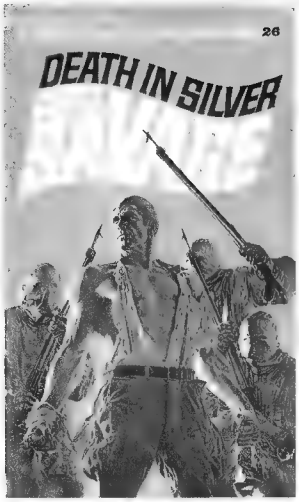
**Ross**: Right. Well, he contacted me, of course, to look for a quote. [Laughter] And I have a copy of the tape, which I had heard about for about a year before he got in touch with me. It was a lot of fun and funny to see all these characters show up. I kept thinking, after Alien came onscreen and then Predator, "So Frankenstein's coming." It seemed a little bit like, "Okay, I understand where you're coming at with this because, yes, I know there were Batman comics with Alien and Predator, but...." It proved a point that Batman looking more like our comic book idea of him works.

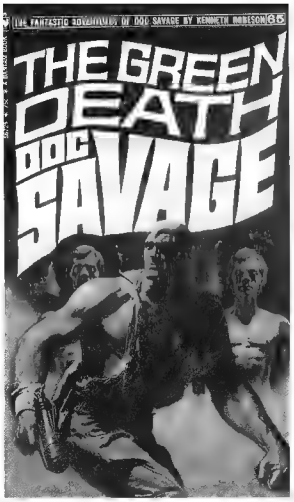
**CBM**: I know you use a tremendous amount of photo reference. Wally Wood had literally thousands of pieces of photo reference, and I've read he meticulously filed everything away—even hiring people to manage his photo reference. Do you do anything similar in your filing system?

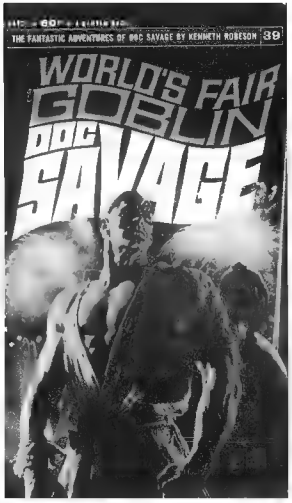
**Ross**: It's all kind of kept where the projects are put off in a corner. I boxed up things based upon what projects they were part of. So if I need to go back to anything, I'll have a mental picture usually of maybe a pose of Superman that was in the Superman book, and I just need to go and find the box that was all filled with Superman photos. It's relatively well organized but I don't have things filed based upon model or...it's not hyper-specific or hyper-meticulous in terms of organization.

**CBM**: How does it feel to be an illustrator thriving in comic book publishing while other illustrators are absolutely struggling in mainstream publishing? There's kind of a strange irony there because traditional illustrators 40 or 50 years ago looked down upon comic book artists.

**The *Mythology* cover in progress. Ross uses extensive photo reference and actually casts particular models as his recurring characters.**




**Ross credits *Doc Savage* paperback illustrator James Bama as one of his greatest influences.**

**Ross**: I think its vengeance. I think it's the kind of thing that American illustration is relatively dead in most other forms. Because when you find things like paperback covers they're in small supply as far as the work that's available there. There's not a lot of work for painters altogether.

**CBM**: There were years there where guys like Bob Peake, Bart Forbes, Merv Corning were highly in demand for everything whether it was even illustration in magazines, which is even becoming slimmer now. That stuff is just disappearing, especially with Photoshop being the most popular tool to illustrate a lot of these things.

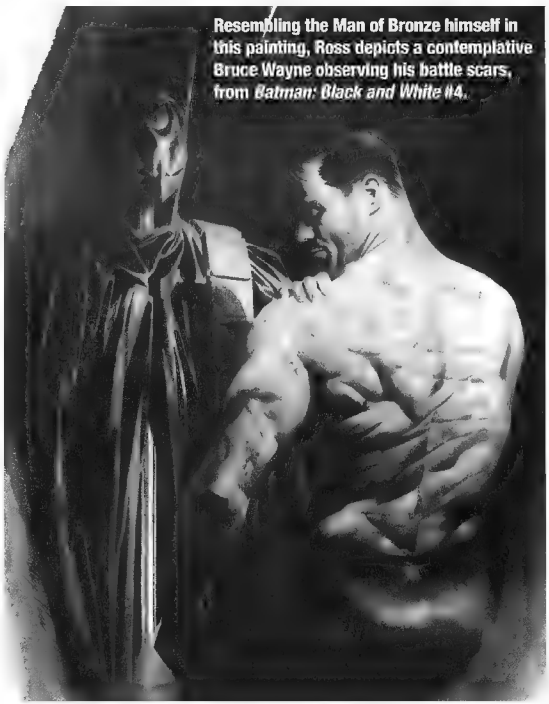
**Ross**: And the thing is that what they're using PhotoShop for it's not necessarily hard to understand why. The art form that illustration can be used for, the expression that it can be good for, it's still there in comics. Now comics being the kind of "ghettoized" medium that it is, has been pushed off in the corner for so long that it demands a following to support it. And that's why we're stuck with only a small handful of genres that can survive at all in the form of comics. In a way it's been kicked so hard by everybody that it's still recovering from those wounds. But I think that illustrators who have been contemptuous of the comics art form are.... Well, they're welcome to their fate.

**CBM**: I'd like to have your opinion about some artists. In this issue there is a companion piece about Norman Saunders, who did the *Mars Attacks* cards and the Batman cards and many pulp covers, what do you think of his work?

**Ross**: A funny thing I think about that is there was an issue of *Alien Worlds* that I got around the age of 11, published in 1981 I think. It was a send-up of the old *Mars Attacks* cards. In the story you see a different card painted, and Ken Steacy pen and inked the story but then the cards were painted in the story and it was a particularly scary story about the cards more or less being a portent of the real attack that was coming. That's what I always think of when I think of the *Mars Attacks* stuff because I wasn't of an age to get that stuff when it first came out in, what, the late '60s?

**CBM**: They came out very early '60s, and then the Batman cards came out around the time of the TV show when Topps couldn't get the rights to show the photographs from the show so they contracted Bob Powell to pencil scenes of Batman and Robin and various villains and Norm Saunders went ahead and painted them.

**Ross**: As it is I was not alive for either event. Of course, the cards for Batman were all featured in Chip Kidd's book, so I have seen all of them. That's pretty cool stuff. I was very much against trading cards in the early part of the '90s because of the fact that a lot of illustrators were devoting all their time to that, you know, comic images and super-hero characters painted



**Resembling the Man of Bronze himself in this painting, Ross depicts a contemplative Bruce Wayne observing his battle scars, from *Batman: Black and White* #4.**

and whatnot, and they were never developing anything on the storytelling end. Of course, all the work dried up for the cards and it became a very slim corridor for doing any kind of painted books. Luckily I was *in* the corridor, but it was a hard drop off for those guys who just took the money for doing the quick cards. I was always just thinking that you could be seen by so many more people if you're on the cover of a book.

**CBM**: And the cards had no lasting power. No one probably remembers the cards that came out in the '90s.

**Ross**: I'm probably one of the only collectors. I've got all of them because I love painted images of super-heroes.

**CBM**: The only ones I remember was the Batman thing that Doug Moench did with the storyline with various artists, but a lot of the other stuff I just don't seem to remember. The thing about Saunders was that he was a pulp artist and when that work dried up he ended up working for Topps. He did everything from Presidents to Civil War items to the *Mars Attacks* and Batman cards.

What about Frank Frazetta?

**Ross**: Well, I grew up with Frank Frazetta's stuff so he was a pretty strong influence as a young kid. I always wanted to draw women like he did. Frazetta was a kind of intermediary stage because I always wanted to do things as realistically as, say, a Rockwell. So when I saw Boris Vallejo I thought, "Well, there you go. That looks more like a photograph." Well, it very much is a photograph. I kind of gravitate towards that slightly more, but then eventually I would come back around to think of Frazetta as being the classic great of all greats for fantasy art.

**CBM**: How about the Doc Savage paperback artist, James Bama?

**Ross**: He would be my favorite of all of them. I still want to try and pick up a lot of strokes of the kind of things he would do with his paintings and his layouts. I think the way that we worked, like, between how he would handle his model for Doc Savage, Steve Holland, is a weird juxtaposition of me with my model for Superman. I think the way we worked is very similar because I make alterations to everything I shoot of my model for Superman. It's not him perfectly, but he is the foundation initially that I rest upon. Bama is even a more contemporary influence than he is a young influence for me because I look at that stuff and say, that I'm trying to compete with. I want to measure up to that.

**CBM**: How about Al Williamson?

**Ross**: I was like any kid reading his *Star Wars* comics in the '70s and '80s. Al's one of the preeminent realistic illustrators in comics history. Following in the pattern after Mac Raboy and, of course, Alex Raymond before them. There's a whole kind of Flash Gordon lineage that I think in some ways the torch that I'll pick up, hopefully, some day is to do something with Flash Gordon to show my love for that particular property which, of course, has this history of the realistic, fantastic illustration, probably the best illustration in comics going from the 1930s to today.

**Ross looks back on Neal Adams work more than any other artist for inspiration.**

**CBM**: What puzzles me is how Al Williamson hasn't been used over the years. They use him as an inker and you rarely see his stuff in pencil anymore.

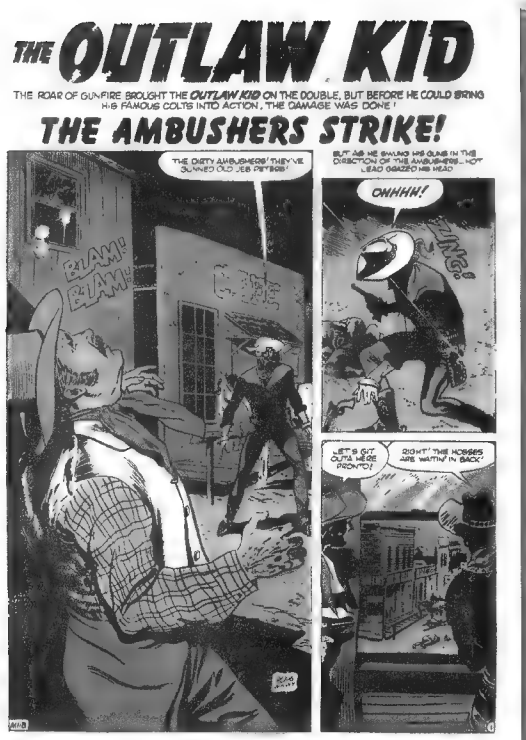
**Ross**: It's not because they don't want to use Al. Al's told me himself that he's burnt out on that stuff. When he did his Flash Gordon revisitation back in the early '90s he said that was burning out at the time. I think that was kind of like a fulfillment of a conclusive dream for him, returning to that character one last time.

**CBM**: How about Wally Wood?

**Ross**: Wally Wood would be in the top three most important artists in the history of comics for my money. Just because the quality of what Wally Wood does is beyond the abilities of most any other person. Even the poorest of his work, towards the later years of his life, there was still the vestiges of the great Wally. The great Wally was so great that it's greater than anything the rest of us has ever done or imagined. The work he was doing at the time he was with EC was just phenomenal. What he did with comics, it's still yet to be equaled.

**CBM**: I guess the last one would be Neal Adams.

**Ross**: I guess I have to repeat a lot of what I said before about Adams. I still look back at a lot of the Adams stuff for the thought of what did he open doors to in a way that I haven't sort of worked into my diet of things I do yet. There's certain ways he would lay out a shot, show the human figure interacting with others, so much I have yet still to learn from Adams. I've always kind of been conscious of the juxtaposition of us two to make sure that my own independence or individuality as an illustrator was there so that I wasn't just one of the many people who was clone of Adams in the '70s. But Adams is such a subconscious influence that, to grow up in the '70s, even if you're not thinking of him affecting you, he *is*. He has seeped into the very fabric of what comics became. I am distinctly a post-Adams artist no matter what.


THE OUTLAW KID
THE ROAR OF GUN-FIRE BROUGHT THE OUTLAW KID ON THE DOUBLE, BUT BEFORE HE COULD BRING HIS FAMOUS COLTS INTO ACTION, THE DAMAGE WAS DONE!
THE AMBUSHERS STRIKE!
THE DIRTY AMBUSHERS! THEY'VE GUNNED OLD JEB PATTERSON!
BLAM! BLAM!
BUT AS HE SWUNG HIS GUNS IN THE DIRECTION OF THE AMBUSHERS... HOT LEAD GRAZED HIS HEAD!
OWHHH!
LET'S GIT OUTA HERE PRONTO!
RIGHT! THE HOSSES ARE WAITIN' IN BACK!

**On this page: Some fine examples of Wildey's work on one of his signature characters, The Outlaw Kid.**

Or maybe it was Wildey who made it the classic that it became. The year was 1964.

Hired by Hanna-Barbera Studios to produce the pilot for a new prime time animated TV series based on the old Jack Armstrong radio program, Wildey was stunned when rights problems killed the project just as it was taking off. But all was not lost.

"Joe Barbera strolled in and said, 'Create another show for us, then,'" Wildey recounted. "I went home and wrote

## Wildey

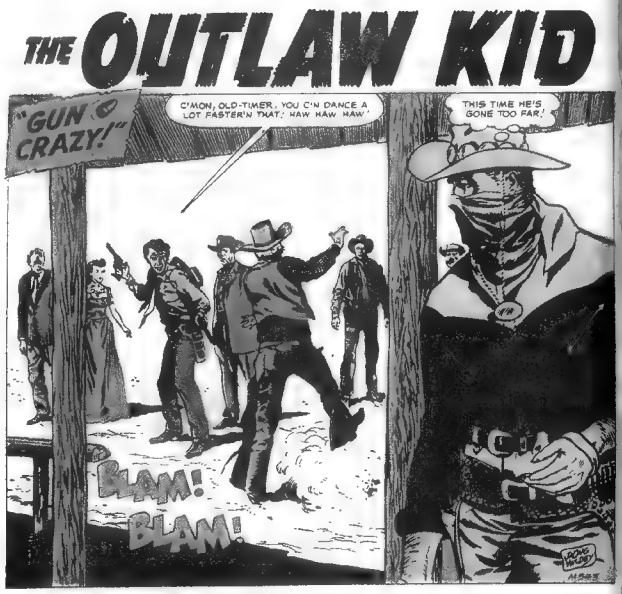
**continued from page 53**

*The Saint*, Wildey drew several issues of *Dr. Kildare* for Dell. No matter what he turned his hand to, he preferred reality-based strips. He kept a massive file of photo references to draw from. From the dawn of his career to its sunset, Doug Wildey never stooped to drawing a single super-hero strip—although on TV it would be a different story.

**Doug Wildey**

"I never liked super-heroes," he insisted. "Today, they still bore me. By the time I got into animation, I had done almost every kind of comic known to man—the sci-fi, the detectives, the uniformed police, the horror, the romance and the westerns."

Then came the show that Wildey became famous for.



**Wildey's cover for *Jonny Quest* #1 (Comico 1986).**

another one, which was actually a parallel to Jack Armstrong. I subsequently came up with Jonny Quest. The working title was 'The Saga of Chip Balloo.' Later, I got Quest out of the LA phonebook."

Wildey was made supervising art producer.

"I was *not* in charge of the animation because I'm not an animator," he recalled. "I would write the story and set the mood, the backgrounds, the characters. I would work mostly on the action part."

Jonny Quest was a spunky 10 year old blonde kid whose scientist father worked for the U.S. government. Accompanying him, Jonny got into adventures all over the globe. Wildey took much of his inspiration from his movie-going childhood. Child actors Jackie Cooper and Frankie Darrow, who often played off adults and were frequently misunderstood, were key to realizing Jonny.

**Actor Jeff Chandler was Wildey's inspiration for Race Bannon.**

"And of course I had *Terry and the Pirates*," Wildey noted. "Not only do I think Caniff is still the greatest storyteller in the business, but after I worked for him and got to know the guy.... they say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. So drawing upon all of those, it was not all that tough."

For the look of Jonny Quest, Wildey borrowed from his own work. He'd had a boy character named Chip in his tryout *Stretch Bannon* newspaper strip, and Wildey simply appropriated him, adding a trademark black turtleneck sweater. Bodyguard Race Bannon was inspired by white-haired B-actor Jeff Chandler, although the name was a combination of two newspaper strip heroes he invented.

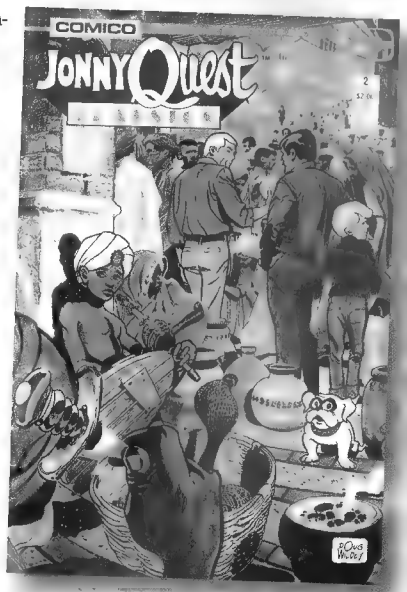
"I once tried an automobile comic strip," he explained. "In my case, my guy was sort of an automobile designer. He raced cars. He had this glamorous European background and raced on American tracks. I called him Stretch Bannon. Then later on, I tried another strip about a writer-artist team that traveled the world together getting into adventures. The name was Race Dunhill. So I put the Race and the Bannon together and that's where Race Bannon came from."

**A sample of Wildey's fine storytelling ability from *Jonny Quest* #2 (Comico 1986).**

Surviving *Stretch Bannon* samples show that Stretch and Race might have been twins. Jonny's father, Dr. Benton Quest was modeled after an obscure character Wildey once drew into *The Saint* strip. Doug Wildey was not a guy to abandon an unsold character.

Creative differences with the Hanna-Barbera Studio often drove the artistic perfectionist to distraction. The studio wanted Jonny to have a pet. Wildey designed a monkey and a white cheetah as possibilities. But the studio insisted on the cliché boy's best friend, a dog.

"I fought against Bandit quite a while," Wildey said. "He was a cartoon dog. It was a little bit too unrealistic for the characters. As soon as they put in Bandit, I immediately created Hadji.




**Wildey's cover for *Jonny Quest* #2 (Comico 1986).**

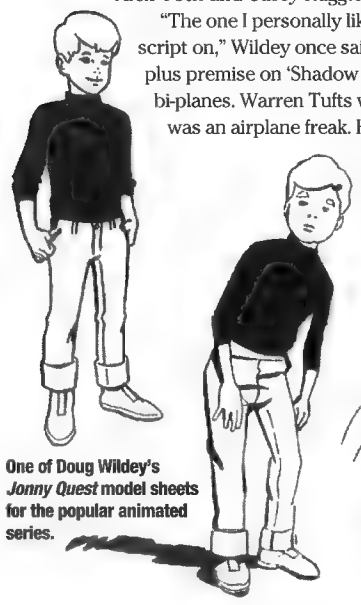
**A beautiful *Jonny Quest* commission piece done by Wildey.**

I felt very strongly that we needed someone besides a dog. It's simply not natural for a kid to talk to grown-ups on the same level."

For Hadji, the Indian boy introduced in "Calcutta Adventure," Wildey harkened back to Sabu, the star of numerous old classic films like *Elephant Boy* and *Thief of Baghdad.* "Later on," Wildey remarked, "when we were auditioning for voices on the series, Sabu's son, Paul Sabu, showed up to audition." He didn't get the part.

Using his clout, Wildey brought in talented people like Alex Toth and *Casey Ruggles* artist Warren Tufts.

"The one I personally liked the best I wrote the script on," Wildey once said. "I did split screenplay plus premise on 'Shadow of the Condor,' about the bi-planes. Warren Tufts was working on it and he was an airplane freak. He did most of the layouts. I did the writing, dialogue, etc. I went into that heavily only because Warren Tufts was into airplanes—as a matter of fact, that's what killed him. He was building his own airplane. He got in it, the wind turned it over, smacked him against a rock and he died. He worked with Ira Spence and Lefty Callahan, two of the animators, on the thing. Warren basically taught them how to fly airplanes just on that one episode. And I designed the characters—a manservant named Julio and the German guy. We did a lot of Nazis in *Jonny Quest.* Nazis make great heavies. Let's face it, that's what they are there for. I thought it was probably the best of the Quests."



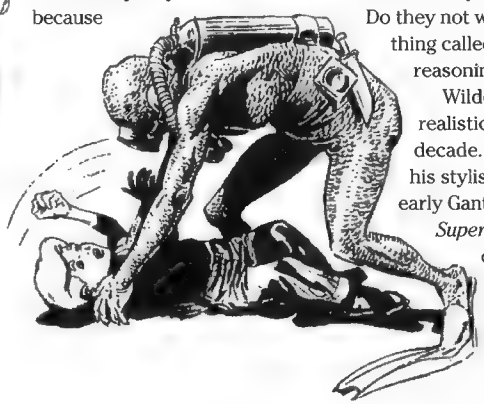
**One of Doug Wildey's *Jonny Quest* model sheets for the popular animated series.**

Aired in prime time, *Jonny Quest* ran only one season but went on to become a well-remembered and highly-regarded classic. It was not TV's first realistic cartoon, but it was the best television had offered up to that time.

"I hate to blow anybody's personal illusions out of the water," he said frankly, "but I didn't think that *Jonny Quest* was a very good show. I thought it was going to be the start of something. I thought that this would be more or less the first pioneer crude attempt at doing a show of this type, which would later be solidified and smoothed—and it just never worked that way. The quality of stuff seemed to go downhill after that, for reasons unknown to me. In retrospect, *Jonny Quest* looks great compared to other shows now on the air."

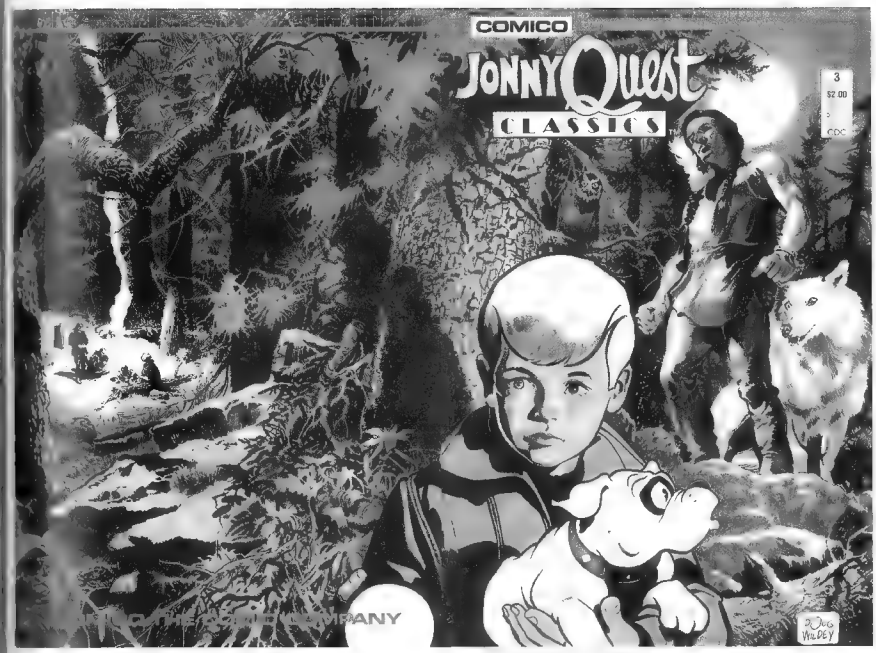
After *Jonny Quest,* Wildey toiled in the animation field for years, ramrodding shows like *The Herculoids, The Mighty Mightor, Jana of the Jungle, Lazer Tag Academy* and a personal favorite, *Return to the Planet of the Apes.* Everywhere he went, Wildey butted heads with creative restrictions.

"I wrote the thirteen premises in a saga connecting one show to another on *Planet of the Apes*," he elaborated. "Each one interconnected and evolved as it went along. I had something going involving trucks on a highway and I called it 'Death's Highway—Chapter 6.' I got a call from the network and they said, 'We can't use death in the title.' The word death? Are they trying to say that death doesn't exist? Do they not want children to say that there is a thing called death? I'm not sure yet what the reasoning was. I never could figure it out."



Wildey was involved in virtually every realistic-style cartoon show for well over a decade. Although it would be hard to detect his stylistic imprint, Wildey had a hand in the early Gantray-Lawrence animated series, *Marvel Super Heroes.* He has been incorrectly credited with *The Fantastic Four,* which was art-directed by Alex Toth.

"I was an art director at that particular studio," Wildey related. "As it happened, I did not do the Human




**Wildey's exquisite front cover spread for *Jonny Quest* #3 (Comico 1986).**

Torch segments. I had nothing to do with them and didn't even know they were being done. My part was creating a new five-minute show for the Sub-Mariner. I art-directed that Sub-Mariner show, and across the street they were doing some of the other shows in which they would take the drawings out of the comic books and animate them from that. But that was a syndicated show. It was not network. I wrote and laid out a number of bridge segments for the Iron Man segments as well."

His strong-willed nature often led to Wildey walking out of promising projects. He abandoned a Tom Swift cartoon show because the studio wanted to update the 1920s teenage inventor-hero to contemporary times. It was a fate that befell many of Wildey's pet projects.

"I hired a young guy named Dave Stevens," Wildey recalled. "At the time, he was a Doc Savage freak. I had never personally read Doc Savage. Dave explained who the characters were and what they did. I felt that Doc Savage had enough strength and I went ahead and did it in my off hours. I brought it in to Joe Barbera and said, 'What do you think?' But he wanted to update it. The charm was gone."

All that remains of that effort is a pair of beautiful production drawings strongly suggesting that if Hanna-Barbera had gone ahead with the show, Doc Savage would have rivaled *Jonny Quest* as an example of great adventure-style animation. Of interest is the fact that Wildey depicted Doc Savage as looking a lot like Race Bannon.

Stevens of course went on to create the popular comics character, the Rocketeer. For a sidekick, Stevens came up with an irascible and excitable master mechanic, whom he dubbed Peevy. Doug Wildey was the real life model for Peevy.

Dissatisfied with animation, Doug Wildey returned to comics in the late '60s. He took over Gold Key's *Tarzan of the Apes* after Russ Manning, at a time when it had become a tie-in to the popular NBC TV series. Drawing upon countless stills of actor Ron Ely, Wildey produced a Tarzan completely different from Manning's, or anyone else's, interpretation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Lord of the Jungle.

"Somebody gave me a call and told me I could do the

**Wildey's second Doc Savage production illustration for the ill-fated animated series.**

**The cover for *Rio Rides Again* graphic novel (Marvel Comics 1990).**

artwork on it. They had written scripts directly from the Burroughs stories, which I had never read. Burroughs was never one of my favorites. I did nine issues of *Tarzan* adaptations, and I also did the issues that adapted NBC's *Tarzan* show."

During the 1970s, Wildey drew a number of DC characters ranging from Sgt. Rock to Blackhawk and yet another western hero, Jonah Hex. He almost never allowed inkers to touch his cinematic pencils, and he rarely inked the work of others. One unusual exception to the latter rule came in 1972, when he and Frank Giacoia divided the inking chores on Alex Toth's 52-page gothic story, "Bride of the Falcon" in DC's *Sinister House of Secret Love* #3. He also contributed to Jim Warren's black and white magazines.

Doug Wildey's comics renaissance was partially triggered by the unexpected return of the Outlaw Kid. In the summer of 1970, Marvel Comics began reprinting the original stories, reintroducing the realistic artistry of Doug Wildey to a new generation of comic book fans. In a period of Jack Kirby clones, Wildey's classic line work, even though it reproduced poorly on modern presses and paper stock, started outselling even Marvel's top gun, Kid Colt.

Word reached Wildey in California. He sent Marvel a polite request for reprint money. It came back with a big "Fat Chance" scrawled across it in red.

When Marvel ran out of Wildey stories to reprint, they revived the bandana-masked gunfighter with new stories and art. Sales sagged. So they went back to reprinting the classic tales. The second run of *The Outlaw Kid* ran five years—two longer than the original.

When former Marvel publisher Martin Goodman launched Atlas/Seaboard, he hired Wildey to create a new western hero, Kid Cody, for *Western Action* #1. Unfortunately, there was no second issue.

Although he'd enjoyed an excellent working relationship with editor Joe Kubert on DC's war comics, Doug Wildey preferred the world of the comic strip. Comic books were just a place in which to practice his craft until he found better things.

"Actually," he once said candidly, "I was a little ashamed of working in the business. I thought it was a crummy, trashy, non-literate business."

For two years, Wildey wrote and drew *Ambler*, a newspaper strip about a wandering folk singer. It represented, he felt, his best work.

"I wrote the outline for television," he revealed. "I only showed it to Joe Barbera. Nobody else ever saw it. And he didn't like it. So I decided to turn it into a comic strip and send it to King Features. King wanted to buy it. They started asking me, 'What's going to happen six or eight weeks from now?' And I kept sending them outlines. And they kept asking for more, so I dumped them. Then I called the *Chicago Tribune/New York News,* and they bought it over the weekend. I did the Sunday, to kick off the strip, with lyrics, and illustrated them, and got into the story that way."

Another strip, *Eddie Race, Private Investigator* ran in Joe Kubert's experimental comics tabloid, *Sojourn.* His rarely-seen adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* ran in *West Magazine* in 1972. But syndicated success eluded him. When independent comics started proliferating, Wildey saw a golden opportunity to change all that. What most fans consider to be Doug Wildey's magnum opus started as a serial running in *Eclipse Monthly* in 1983. Of course, "Robber's Roost" was another western.

The character was known only as Rio. A former road agent, train robber and gunslinger, Rio was pardoned by President U. S. Grant and became an agent of the government, which brought him into contact with, instead of the typical B-western Black Hat heavies endemic to newsstand

**A wonderful example of Wildey's accuracy in depicting the old west from *Rio Rides Again.***

TEN PAST EIGHT STILL NO SIGN OF IM?
NOTHING MOVING ON THE ROAD AL.
SUMPN'S WRONG
THIS JOB'S GONE SOUR, R LEY. WE GOTTA LEAVE! NOW!
THESE CAVES GIT FILLED WITH WATER IN A HEAVY RAIN.
WHAT ABOUT THE KID?
HE C'N IDENAFY US...
...DO WHAT HAS'TA BE DONE.

**Wildey lends some amazing atmosphere to this page from *Rio Rides Again.***

comic books, real historical figures like Geromino. In a dramatic departure from his earlier pen and ink comics line work, Wildey accented the strip with heavy use of zip-a-tone complimented by moody watercolors. Fans, old and new, went wild over Wildey all over again.

"What I was trying to do was get some kind of a western that would have a little authenticity and historical consequence to it, and not make it the usual comic book," Wildey explained. "With most of the events in *Rio,* the dates have been changed or altered to enhance the story, but the incidents that occur in *Rio* are based on historical fact."

Wildey felt this historical approach is what set *Rio* apart from what had gone on in the genre up until that point.

"I think it is effective," he stated, no doubt harkening back to his experience on *The Outlaw Kid* thirty years before, "Effective enough that if anybody reads the thing, they will at least not see the usual shooting of guns out of hands and that type of thing, which has been done eighty zillion times in comic books. This is a kind of departure in that sense."

*Robber's Roost* was first collected in 1987 as a 64-page Comico graphic novel entitled *Rio.* Hailed by some as the greatest western comics story in the history of the medium, it earned Doug Wildey both the Harvey and Eisner Awards for 1988, and led to a beautifully-rendered cinematic sequel, *Rio Rides Again,* in which Wildey's hero meets Jesse James. Ironically, Marvel published it.

When Stan Lee went west to take charge of Marvel's film properties, fate brought him back in contact with Doug Wildey.

"I was a producer at Marvel productions and the idea there was to take the entire Marvel library of characters out of all the Marvel comic books and come up with the strongest ones and make them television characters," Wildey explained. "There are some things that I considered totally invalid and absolutely ridiculous. I was involved at Hanna-Barbera with a show that I was supposed to produce called *The Thing,* another Stan Lee/Marvel character. I thought that it was a straight show based on the comic book where it's sort of a Hulk-type character, except that it's seemingly made out of rocks. As it turned out, Stan Lee came through and I conferred with him several times. They had taken sort of a funny approach to the show. It was a Popeye show type of thing, and I don't do that style. So I handed it off to another producer."

EVENING BOYS. BANK'S BUSINESS HOURS ARE OVER.
YOU'RE ALL BUNCHED TOGETHER, TOO.
NOTE MY SCATTER-GUN. AND THERE'S THREE MORE BEHIND ME.
SHOW YOURSELVES.
THAT'S IT, BOYS...RABBIT RIGHT ON OUT OF TOWN.
YOU, TOO, COTTON. I'VE KNOWN DOSS YOU COULD'T CALL MOTHER!

**Classic old west gunplay courtesy of Doug Wildey, *Rio Rides Again.***

**Wildey's back cover for *Rio Rides Again.***

Offered the opportunity to helm cartoon versions of She-Hulk and a new Fantastic Four show, Wildey looked for a way out.

"At the same time," Wildey related, "Joe Barbera had gotten hold of Godzilla—26 episodes. I didn't like the super-hero stuff. Never did. So I opted to take the Godzilla job."

Wildey wasn't happy with *The Godzilla Power Hour* either.

"It was a bad show. Only because the network was very, very afraid of everything. They didn't want this big monster to be *bad.* They wanted him to be like a teacher's pet."

Once, Marvel had turned to Wildey for presentation art for an important TV project. When asked his fee, Wildey, recalling Marvel's reprint money rebuff, did some fast calculating.

"I figured out what a fair price would be..." he explained, "then I added a thousand dollars in honor of the Outlaw Kid, and then I laid it on 'em!"

This time he collected.

Then came his reunion with Jonny Quest. Partly inspired by nostalgia, partially because new animated episodes had begun running on *The Funtastic World of Hanna-Barbera* in 1986, Jonny Quest was once again in the public eye. Comico licensed a new *Jonny Quest* comic book. The first creator they called was Doug Wildey.

"Comico asked me if I would like to do it," Wildey said at the time. "I hadn't done any comics in four or five years. It seemed to me important to kick the thing off right, so it wouldn't get too far away from the characters' original designs. I figured I'd have some fun."

More than twenty years had passed since the original run of *Jonny Quest,* but Wildey was both surprised and pleased to discover that he didn't have to refit the character designs for the 1980s.

"They managed somehow to still look contemporary," he noted. "I kept the characters and updated the story."

For the kickoff, Wildey wrote and drew a new adventure, "The Sands of Khasda Tahid." It was received so well Comico asked him to adapt three of his favorite episodes for their *Jonny Quest Classics.*

"They're not particularly favorites," he admitted. "I selected the three stories—'Shadow of the Condor,' 'Calcutta Adventure' and 'Werewolf of the Timberland'—only because of the palettes used on three different locales."

The same painterly approach that had worked so well on Rio made Jonny Quest crackle with excitement. And for the first time, Wildey had complete creative control over the final Quest product.

At that time, interest in Jonny Quest was high. The new animated series was so hot, Hollywood was talking about a Jonny Quest live-action movie. But Wildey was left out of all of it.

Previously, Wildey had attempted to re-launch the character on TV. He explained the premise this way:

"Jonny Quest grows up, Hadji grows up, Race gets older, etc., but basically we continue about young Dr. Quest who's twenty-two years old and who has graduated from M.I.T. or whatever, and we'd carry on from there."

After *Young Dr. Quest* failed to get off the ground, Wildey lost interest in the character's animated possibilities, and saw *Jonny Quest Classics* as his farewell to the beloved boy hero.

"Other than a movie," he confessed, "if I'm lucky enough to get consulted, this will probably be the end of my participation in Jonny Quest."

And it was. Wildey continued turning out gorgeous yet evocatively naturalistic Rio graphic novels. The third one, *Rio At Bay*, built on the deceptively-simple plot premise of Rio riding shotgun to a stagecoach headed for San Francisco's Barbary Coast, was published by Dark Horse as a two-part limited series in 1992. He seemed content to focus on his first love, the cowboy West and its colorful inhabitants.

"The westerns, of course, were the best for me," Wildey once reminisced. "I just like them. I have always liked cowboys. I was a big rodeo fan at one point, and did a little bit of amateur rodeoing when I lived over in Arizona."

That same year, some of his western canvases were shown in a Nevada art show entitled "The Best of the West." The publication of some of his best western art in a book called *The Movie Cowboy* was another happy milestone. After several frustrating years of having his work displayed in art galleries without great success, the self-taught artist from Yonkers felt he'd finally arrived.

Mark Evanier tells the story of the day Doug Wildey showed him his latest western painting. When Evanier wondered what media he'd worked in, Wildey proudly pointed out different areas of the canvas. "This part is oil...this is acrylics...the yellow here is gouache except for this part, which is Magic Marker...the hat is Crayola, and this whole section is colored ink..."

"The first thing they teach you in art school is never mix media," Evanier pointed out.

Wildey gave Evanier a big self-made-man grin. "Well, I can do it because I never went to art school!"

When Doug Wildey died on October 5, 1994, he left a single unfinished Rio page on his drawing board. It would have been his fifth graphic novel featuring the hard-bitten westerner.

You might say he died with his boots on.

***Market Report***

*[continued from page 22]*

appearances or origins. Y'know, Punisher, Doc Ock, Elektra, etc. Also, *Iron Man* #55 has caught fire because of the popular new *Thanos* series from Marvel. Batman continues to be more in favor with collectors with every passing month too! DC keeps putting out several series, graphic novels and miniseries that are of high quality and capture more fans regularly. I'm finding that Batman outsells Superman 2 to 1 in Golden and Silver Age. I love Superman, and all his far flung and crazy offshoots, but a large segment of fandom is fascinated by the brooding, mysterious, near crazy mystique that surrounds Batman.

Dells and Gold Keys are hit or miss, but the TV comics are very popular. They're worth having for the covers alone, which present excellent photo stills. And they remind us of our favorite shows: *Star Trek*, *Wild Wild West*, *Monkees*, *Bewitched* and a zillion others. The funny animals are hit or miss. Barks' work is always popular, as is Kelly's. Most others need to be discounted a bit in order. It's a shame that everyone's obsessed with super-heroes because there are many very charming books in this realm. (I actually collect some of them. Don't tell.) Westerns appeal to only certain collectors too, but there are a lot of very cool and nicely done ones, especially in the '50s. Great covers and art, and the stories are quite entertaining. War books are selling pretty consistently. The DC big 5 titles lead the way. I'm not sure if our current national wartime situation has contributed to the upswing in sales, or if it would have happened anyway. The Atlas '50s titles are gaining popularity. Collectors are realizing they have excellent covers and art (at times dazzling), and are cheap. Archies, Harveys, Charltons, Tower, ACGs are all fairly consistent. Early Archie titles from the '40s sell great when we have 'em, but they're scarce. Towers sell well. The fact that they're loaded with Wally Wood art don't hurt none.

I'll talk about Golden Age next time, since I've filled your ears enough. May the Seven Rings of Raggador never imprison you!

## Al Stoltz

**Basement Comics**
**Basmntcomx@aol.com**
**443-831-2761**

No major shows started just yet, and Florida's Mega Con is a few weeks away. I guess eBay would be our activity to report these few months in the New Year, followed by a few local shows we have wandered into.

Ebay is alive and strong for us since December. We have sold a huge amount of material and continue to mix it up. We may offer a *Detective* #2 and a $4.99 magazine in the same auction and it seems to work just fine. Our sell-thru is great and how successful we have been is based on the amount of mail going out to the Post Office—a lot!

Recently sold a *Strange Worlds* #3 CGC 9.4 Lost Valley Pedigree for $4,500 to a major Avon collector on eBay. This was the highest graded copy by CGC to date and really was a stunner copy. All items from art to fanzines are selling very well on eBay and for the most part we are seeing 70-80% of our show prices realized on lots. The unfortunate fact is we have to wind down our long run on eBay of material due to multiple shows coming in March. We hope to get the number of auctions back up to full steam by early April and reap more of the e-money out there.

Local shows have had a mixed result so far. I see many collectors in our area looking for the extreme bargain or, worse, super high grade at a cut rate price—I do not see that happening soon. We take a mix of blowout stock to one show and try regular inventory at another and it seems to be good guessing on our part so far as to what show gets what.

Spider-Man and oddball Marvel titles such as *Tales of Suspense* and *Tales to Astonish* have been doing better than others at smaller shows. Even managed to sell a few Dell File Copies at a Philadelphia show last weekend. I am sure that Mega Con and following bigger shows will give a better reflection of the 2004 market, then I can write about a more accurate trend I see developing.

## Jamie Graham

**Graham Crackers Comics Ltd.**
**1271 Rickert Dr. #135**
**Naperville, IL 60540**
**630-820-2122**
**www.grahamcrackers.com**

Random Thoughts from the Heartland! I think 2004 will be a strong year for comics, especially Bronze. The high prices for those certain keys (*Spidey* #129, *Hulk* #181, etc) will continue and instead of looking astronomical as they did last year, they will become the norm. Just you wait. *Spidey* #129 9.6 (*Guide* $290) $2100; *Hulk* #181 9.6 (*Guide* $1100) $5500 and other books less obvious will stay strong—*Hulk* #140 for example.

Silver will continue strong, but with more 9.4s and 9.2s coming out the shift will be to 9.4/9.6 in medium priced books. Record prices for high grade keys will continue. I foresee no slowing down of Bronze and Silver anytime soon. Any economic indicator that in the past had affected our hobby will be ineffective this time around. Only the higher end books, $10,000 and up, may be affected. Usually around this time, collectors would get frustrated at the lack of availability and high prices and shift into another segment of the market. Traditionally, when Gold went into high, collectors shifted into Silver because it seemed reasonable—then when that climbed they looked at Atomic Age comics or back at main Gold. And these segments break down further, but the last 30 years that's been the trend.

The changes that have occurred are the coming of eBay, and the economy (as expected), and a new factor: *the average age of the collector.* These guys are the ones who when younger didn't relate to Golden Age because it wasn't affordable and they were too young to care. Their heroes were Fantastic Four, Hulk, Spider-Man and Batman. Now they are in their late twenties and thirties and can easily buy books from their childhood. And there are more collectors with more disposable income. Ebay and the web have made it easier to disseminate information, and to find books. I believe these collectors are going to drive the

market for some time. It has made older collectors (like me) jump in and buy quality pieces for theimselves at what seems like ridiculous prices. Many of us want to protect ourselves from having to buy them later at even higher prices.

Many of us who have been collecting for a while (30 years) feel like idiots when we overpay (over *Guide* to multiples of). We have serious buyer's remorse. We are targets of friends' ridicule and jokes. Then a year goes by and darn if that questionable buy doesn't turn out ok! Several years ago I was ribbed for buying an *Amazing Spider-Man* #50 CGC 9.6 double cover for something like $1200—2.5 times *Guide*! Well, in today's climate—how did I do? Pretty good I would say! Now you can see why this market has yet to peak. The web makes everybody a wheeler-dealer as it allows more collectors to buy and sell directly, it puts more dough in their pockets, allowing them freedom to buy more, which allows them to turn their extras or mistakes into cash, which means more profit, which in turn allows them to buy more, which allows—whew! See what I mean!? I remember San Diego the second summer after the coming of eBay. Wow! Was there a lot of extra dough in the room! Many, many collectors had extra cash that summer. It was great! The economy didn't seem so hot but here were lots of guys with money burning a hole in their pockets.

That is not to say all things are good bets. Look at Gold. Most is a hard sell, except at 30% discount (hey Bob!!!), and only mainstream Gold seems to generate any real interest (DC and Timely). I strongly feel that we need another *Price Guide* adjustment *down for Gold* (at the mid to low ends), especially the out-of-favor titles. Those titles have almost a zero chance of coming back. (Come on. Classics has had its day, so have Westerns.) Some Bronze just doesn't want to perform!! *Giant Size X-Men* #1 is a dog—a Big Dog at 9.2 or below—and I don't see it ever jumping. Too many copies? Not a sexy cover? This year I am very positive on the market, but I will stay out of big books. There should be more bargains in those large dollar items, not *Action* #1, but certainly *Human Torch* #1 or *Subby* #1? YEP! I hope that we have some more events like the Jim Lee Batman series to bring back many of the disenchanted reader-collectors. We need an event like that again. Let's hope Jim's Superman sparks more interest and brings all of us new avenues to increase our sales.

*Opinions expressed in* CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

### *Marketplace Mail*

*[continued from page 10]*

presented. Additional color is also welcome—it's one of the things that differentiates you from competitors such as *Back Issue* and *Alter Ego* (both fine magazines too). I'm not sure about the idea of converting to a TPB. I'd be likely to support it but would the entire readership?

Christy Law
London England

I agree with your idea of a new direction for *COMICS!* (great title in its simplicity). I've never been interested in the marketplace aspect of the journal. If I ever want to sell my sixties and seventies comic books there's other ways to do it.

Though I wasn't there during the Golden Age of newspaper strips, I have always found it fascinating to read them or about them. I came of age during the sixties and though comic books are my first love, I would love to see articles on *Moon Mullins*, *Smilin' Jack*, *Henry*, *Louie*, *Buz Sawyer*, and those artists who had a similar style to Caniff. So you get my vote for your idea. Your, along with *Comics Journal*, *Comic Art* and *Hogan's Alley,* are my favorites.

José Medina
New York NY

I'm not sure what effect the proposed changes would have for the magazine, except to increase the price yet again.

1. I see no reason to change the name. I'm not necessarily against it, but the magazine has built up years of identity with the current name.

2. I like the fact the magazine comes out monthly. I like the fact it covers the market. Whether you like it or not, we all are involved in the pricing and grading of comics and we need to hear from people who deal daily in those aspects.

3. I wouldn't mind seeing more color pages, but I have no interest in paying more money. If that's your aim, do special issues so regular readers don't have to purchase those extra-cost items if they aren't interested.

4. I thought the book already was supposed to be covering everything about the medium. And, for the most part, it does a pretty good job.

5. I must have missed the article about Captain Marvel's buttons. How many does his uniform have? I think the magazine in its present form does present some pretty scholarly articles. I don't buy the magazine so I can slog through a 20-page dissertation. I buy it to find out a few new facts about comics. I don't want to feel like I'm reading a text book. When that day comes, I'll quit buying.

6. I couldn't care less about whether it finds its way into Barnes & Noble. Sure, it would be nice to grow the hobby (which I think is the idea), but the shape or form isn't going to do it. And if the material isn't timely, I have no reason to buy it.

I buy *CBM* because I want some light reading each month about a hobby I enjoy. I like to see what the big dealers have to say. I like a variety of topics and to learn about comics that relate to my interests.

I look for the letters, Michelle Nolan, the "Market Report" and prices, and the "Greatest Comic Book Ever." I loved the article on the end of DC's Silver Age, just as I enjoyed the look at Pretzleburg and the black market books from the '40s.

Dan Basso
Owosso MI

# 49 That Wonderful Year

by Michelle Nolan

## The End of the Golden Age

That wonderful year 1949 was only wonderful depending on what you love to collect. The year marked the real beginning of romance comics and the actual end of the Golden Age.

Comics historians have debated endlessly when the Golden Age ended. Some say it was as early as 1945. Others contend the Golden Age ended with *All Star Comics* #57 (Feb/Mar 1951), featuring the final adventure in the Justice Society of America's original run. Some say the gilded period extended to Fawcett's final issue of *The Marvel Family* (#89, Jan 1954). Still others say that the Golden Age slightly overlapped with the Silver Age and finally concluded with *Plastic Man* #64 (Nov 1956).

In one respect, I'll vote with those who cite *All Star* #57, but only because it marked the last Golden Age appearance of six important DC costumed characters. However, Wonder Woman was the only active Justice Society member to appear anywhere other than in JSA epics after 1949. When you factor in how many other Golden Age characters vanished that year, I'll go with 1949 as the true end of the Golden Age.

Yet however dismal 1949 may have seemed for the fans of "The First Heroic Age," as Jerry Bails has so adeptly dubbed it, it was in many other respects a wonderful year for comics. A record 2,253 newsstand comics were published, as listed in comics historian Dan Stevenson's year-by-year, issue-by-issue database. To put that into perspective, that was almost exactly twice as many issues as appeared in 1944 and 1945 combined—and both of those years produced record totals to that point.

Comics diversified as never before in 1949, with dozens upon dozens of new titles in the western, crime, humor and romance genres. Unlike any other genre in the history of comics before or since, the circulation of romance comics simply exploded, especially in the second half of 1949.

In 1950, the romance comics eruption produced what I long ago named "The Love Glut," but in 1949 there still was absolutely no indication of the financial heartbreak to come. On the contrary, comic book publishers must have thought they had found a never-ending source of profit. Romance comics titles simply overwhelmed newsstands in 1949. Not counting rebound giants, there were no fewer than 119 romance titles in 1949—all but four of them new!—resulting in a whopping 289 issues. Compare this to 61 crime titles consisting of 261 issues, along with 64 western titles and 75 costume hero titles (super-heroes, costume heroes and jungle heroes combined).

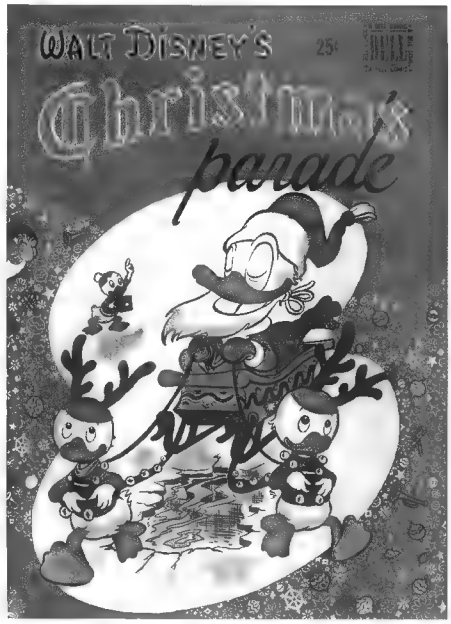
The mind boggles at how quickly publishers fell in love with love.

After all, there were exactly 13 romance comics published with 1948 dates. The only non-teen-themed romance comics issued that year were Prize's *Young Romance* #3-8, Fawcett's *Sweethearts* #68-70 (the first three issues), Marvel's *My Romance* #1-2 (soon to become *My Own Romance*) and Fox's *My Life* #4-5 (the first two issues).

Imagine just how romance bloomed—from four titles and 13 issues from four companies all the way to 119 titles and 289 issues from 22 companies in one year!

Marvel Comics publisher Martin Goodman was so smitten with romance that he published 27 romance titles covering 47 issues in 1949. Yet by the middle of 1950, he was down to five (!) romance titles.

The only significant publishers in 1949—the 16 firms who produced at least 40 issues—who did not produce any romance comics that year were Dell and Fiction House. Other than a couple of western one-shots, Dell never really did romance, and Fiction House tried the genre only in the sub-genre entry *Cowgirl Romances* beginning in 1950.




Interestingly, though, only five firms of any importance went out of the comic book business in 1949, and none of them turned out any romance comics—David McKay (36 issues), Novelty (32), Parents (32), Street & Smith (24) and Columbia (14).

Perhaps the most influential story to appear in 1949, though, was published in *Superman* #61 (Nov/Dec 1949). In that memorable tale, Superman learned of his origins on Krypton and his

elemental nemesis, Kryptonite, made its first appearance in comics. Kryptonite had been a radio story staple for years and even played a role in the first Superman serial in 1948. But co-creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—gone from Superman by 1949—never used it in their comic book stories.

The other major story of 1949 was the Duck Family epic "Letter to Santa" by the inimitable Carl Barks in Dell's first *Christmas Parade* giant. That milestone issue began a dozen years of more than 100 absolutely wonderful Dell quarter comics. Many of my most treasured childhood memories are tied up in those Dell giants, which were usually nothing less than sheer works of art.

Perhaps the most important first issue in 1949 was *Superboy* #1, four years after his first appearance in *More Fun* #101 (Jan/Feb 1945). Superboy was the only successful super-hero title to be introduced in 1949. It turned out to be a canny business decision by DC, which otherwise was busy dispatching many of its heroes into limbo.

Three milestone Archie Series titles began as 1949 one-shots—*Archie's Pal Jughead*, *Archie's Rival Reggie* and *Katy Keene*, quickly followed by *Archie's Girls Betty and Vernoica* in 1950. Reggie lasted only 14 issues through 1954, but the other three titles were huge hits in the 1950s. By the way, lots of fans don't realize that our iconic teen-ager and his crowd appeared in only three bi-monthly comics covering 18 issues in 1949—*Archie*, *Pep* and *Laugh*. Archie grew very slowly in the 1940s.

More than two dozen Golden Age super-hero and costume hero titles ended in 1949 in the wake of dozens of disappearances in the 1945-48 period. Among the most significant were *Big Shot Comics*, *Black Terror*, *Boy Commandoes*, *Captain America*, *Crack Comics*, *Exciting Comics*, *Fighting Yank*, *Flash Comics*, *Green Hornet*, *Green Lantern*, *Human Torch*, *Marvel Mystery Comics*, *National Comics*, *Phantom Lady*, *Shadow Comics*, *Smash Comics*, *Sub-Mariner*, *Super Comics*, *Super Mystery Comics* and *Target Comics*.

Stability was not a hallmark of the newsstands in 1949, especially since so many pulp magazines were on life support as well. Of the more than 500 titles published in 1949—including one-shots in the Dell Four Color series—only a handful of comic books were published monthly. Ironically, many of them still featured super and costume heroes.

What, then, were the titles published often enough to be considered the most consistent sellers? Here's the list, in alphabetical order: *Action*, *Adventure*, *Airboy*, *Captain Marvel Adventures*, *Captain Marvel Junior*, *Classics Illustrated*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Crime Does Not Pay*, *Detective*, *Dick Tracy*, *Famous Funnies*, *Feature Comics*, *Gabby Hayes Western*, *Gene Autry*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Joe Palooka*, *Jumbo*, *Jungle*, *Lone Ranger*, *Looney Tunes*, *Marge's Little Lulu*, *Marvel Family*, *Master*, *Miss America*, *Modern*, *Monte Hale*, *Nyoka the Jungle Girl*, *Police*, *Real Clue Crime Stories*, *Red Ryder*, *Roy Rogers*, *Star Spangled*, *Sweethearts*, *Tom Mix Western*, *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*, *Walter Lantz New Funnies* and *Whiz*.

That's only 36 titles—including Gilberton's *Classics Illustrated*, which of course was a series of largely endlessly reprinted one-shots—of which all but 13 titles were published by either DC, Fawcett or Dell. There were three from Quality, two from Lev Gleason, Hillman and Fiction House, and one each from Timely, Eastern Color, Gilberton and Harvey (Dell published *Dick Tracy* that year).

It's fascinating to observe that romance comics grew so slowly in the 18-month period from October 1947 through March 1949 that only Fawcett, with *Sweethearts*, was willing to gamble on a monthly romance title. That was probably an experiment to take advantage of the market the company enjoyed with its overwhelmingly popular *True Confessions* magazine.

It's also intriguing to note the transition from the dominance of anthologies to single-character titles. There were 15 monthlies with eponymous characters, including eight westerns, and star characters underpinned most unanthologies as well.

Consider, also, that all five of the regular titles with Marvel Family characters were produced monthly, even though 1949 was supposedly the end of the Golden Age. It sure wasn't the finish for Fawcett! I suspect that as other super-heroes went by the wayside, it helped the circulation of the Marvel Family characters, even though Mary Marvel already had disappeared from both her own title and *Wow Comics* as part of the purge.

It's noteworthy to spot the relative paucity of humor comics in 1949. *Miss America*—Timely's answer to the concept originated by Parents Magazine in 1941 with *Calling All Girls*—was the only monthly teen humor title, while *Marge's Little Lulu* was overwhelmingly dominant in her niche. As for funny animals, only the theater-cartoon titans—Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny and Woody Woodpecker—merited monthly appearances, albeit in anthologies.

Crime and horror in 1949? There were no monthly horror comics in 1949, and only three year-long crime titles. Those are stories more appropriate for wonderful years to come.

# Julius Schwartz 1915-2004

Official DC Press Release

Julius Schwartz, one of the best-loved and most influential members of both the comics and science fiction communities, died Sunday morning, February 8, in Winthrop Hospital in New York from complications from pneumonia. Schwartz was 88 years old.

Schwartz, who was popularly called "a living legend" and served as DC's Editor Emeritus, will be remembered as one of the founders of science fiction fandom, as a comic book editor whose vision spanned five decades with DC Comics, and as the architect of comics' Silver Age, revitalizing the careers of such superheroes as Batman, Superman, The Flash, Green Lantern and The Justice League of America.

"DC has lost a living legend this weekend and a true original," says Paul Levitz, DC's President & Publisher. "Julie was an editor who entertained and educated millions over three generations, performed the near-impossible feat of getting great work out of his contributors without ever ruffling their feelings, and taught many of us our craft. If the measure of an editor is the respect of his peers, he was immeasurable—for his peers who loved and respected him were often legends in their own right. Most of us were simply left in awe."

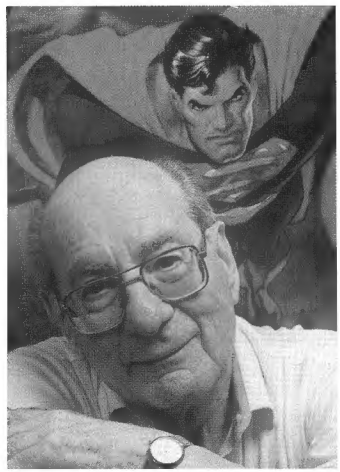
Schwartz was born on June 19, 1915, in the Bronx, NY. In 1932 he created science fiction's first fanzine, *The Time Traveler*, with fellow enthusiasts Mort Weisinger and Forrest J Ackerman. With Weisinger, he formed Solar Sales Service, the first literary agency specializing in science fiction, with clients including Ray Bradbury, Henry Kuttner, Alfred Bester, H.P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, and many others. In 1939 he helped organize the first World Science Fiction Convention.

Schwartz left the world of science fiction in 1944 to join the staff of All-American Comics (one of DC's predecessor imprints), where he was hired by Sheldon Mayer. As script editor, Schwartz contributed to *Green Lantern*, *All-Star Comics*, *The Flash*, and many others. As interest in superhero comics faded in the late 1940s, Schwartz moved on to a variety of titles including *All-American Western*, *Danger Trail*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, and *Rex The Wonder Dog*. His passion for science fiction shined through in launching *Mystery in Space* and *Strange Adventures*, which featured fondly remembered series including Captain Comet, Space Museum, the Atomic Knights, Star Hawkins, and Space Cabby.

During this time, Schwartz continued to work with his favored stable of writers including John Broome and Gardner Fox, and artists such as Gil Kane, Carmine Infantino, Murphy Anderson and Joe Kubert. With these creators and others, Schwartz would soon lead comics into a new age.

Schwartz's career—and the history of comics—turned a corner with the publication of *Showcase* #4 (Oct 1956). The issue, which featured the debut of a new Flash, was a hit: it marked the start of the Silver Age of Comics, and of Schwartz's unparalleled streak at reintroducing Golden Age heroes in a way that would appeal to current comics readers.

The Flash soon was followed by the debuts of a new Green Lantern (*Showcase* #22, Sep 1959), the Justice League of America (*The Brave and The Bold* #28, Feb 1960), Hawkman (*The Brave & The Bold* #34, Feb 1961), and The Atom (*Showcase* #34, Sep 1961). Not content only to



reinvent past heroes, Schwartz edited the far-flung adventures of science fiction hero Adam Strange, who made his debut in *Showcase* #17 (Nov 1958).

"I know a lot of people in our business, but not many I could call my friend," says acclaimed artist Kubert. "Julie helped a lot of people in this business, as an editor and as a person, mostly by being a good guy and a straight guy. He came off as a curmudgeon, but he had a soft heart underneath it all."

"Schwartz was a fan, and agent, and editor," writes New York *Times* best-selling novelist Neil Gaiman. "Without Julie, our media landscape would look nothing like it does today. His passing really is the end of an era."

Schwartz's comics were noted for their rugged heroes, who were scientists, test pilots, and adventurers. Readers enjoyed their attention to detail and their mix of science fact and fiction, as well as their tongue-in-cheek sense of humor and strong romantic relationships between the heroes and their leading ladies.

In September 1961, Schwartz transformed the world of DC Comics

into a complex multiverse with *The Flash* #123. "Flash of Two Worlds" opened up the possibility that DC's Silver Age heroes could race into adventure alongside their Golden Age predecessors. It was an idea inspired by science fiction, and one that Schwartz would use for years to come in annual Justice League/ Justice Society crossovers, and in stories that introduced Earth-2, Earth-3, Earth-S, Earth-X, and even Earth-Prime, home of DC Comics and Schwartz himself. This depiction of the science fiction concept of multiple earths became so iconic that it became the basis for a recent cover on a national science magazine.

By 1964, Schwartz's reputation for revitalizing DC's characters had grown so great that he was asked to rework Batman, whose adventures he edited through 1978. The "New Look" Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics* #327 (May 1964). The issue featured the addition of an easily recognized bright yellow oval on the Dark Knight Detective's chest, while the tone of the stories shifted to moody and mysterious.

Schwartz helped move the comics industry forward again in the late 1960s by teaming Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams for the first time in *Detective Comics* #395 (Jan 1970), which started the collaboration that still informs the portrayal of the Dark Knight today. Under Schwartz's watchful eye, O'Neil and Adams also created an award-winning run of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* that brought the concept of relevant, contemporary issues into comics.

Following the retirement of his old collaborator Weisinger, Schwartz stepped in as the new Superman editor from 1971 through 1985. Typically, Schwartz enhanced what made the Man of Steel work while downplaying elements that seemed dated. He pared down Superman's out-of-this-world abilities, introduced a host of new characters into the Man of Steel's milieu, and gave Clark Kent a new job as TV reporter.

Schwartz retired from editing monthly comic books in 1986 with the two-part story "Whatever Happened to the Man of Tomorrow?," which appeared in *Superman* #423 and *Action Comics* #583. The story, written by Alan Moore with art by Curt Swan, George Pérez and Kurt Schaffenberger, served as a closing chapter to the Silver Age of Superman.

As a coda to his career as a comic book editor, Schwartz edited seven *DC Science Fiction Graphic Novels*, adapted from classic science fiction works by Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg, Bradbury, and others.

Since his retirement in 1987, Schwartz made countless appearances as a goodwill ambassador for DC Comics. He has received awards including the First Fandom Hall of Fame Award, the Shazam, the Eagle, the Alley, the Inkpot and the Jules Verne Awards. In 1998, DragonCon established the Julie Award, whose recipients, including Bradbury, Ackerman, Gaiman, Ellison, Will Eisner and others, are recognized for achievements in multiple genres.

Schwartz's memoirs, *Man of Two Worlds: My Life in Science Fiction and Comics*, co-written with Brian Thomsen, was published by HarperCollins in 2000.

Schwartz is survived by his son-in-law, three grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. The family asks that donations be made to the Julius Schwartz Scholarship Fund, c/oDC Comics, 1700 Broadway, New York NY 10019.

### *Inspiration Central*

*[continued from page 18]*

**Beck**: Later on, I began to study an array of art spanning ancient Chinese and Egyptian work, to Impressionists, modern abstract art, and American illustration. I also studied the work of Jack Davis, Bernie Wrightson, John Buscema and Kelly Freas.

Over the past decade my interests have mainly been in comic, sci-fi and fantasy. Alex Ross, David Mack, Joe Jusko, Michael Whelan were my favorites. Since [I've begun] working in comics the past five years, I've enjoyed the work of Butch Guice, Mike Oeming, Brian Hitch, John Cassaday, Chris Moeller, Jan Duursema, Clayburn Moore and Randy Bowman.

**CBM**: What do you get from the act of creation as an artist?

**Beck**: Creating art is a great emotional release for me. I believe that I have been able to develop a "style," if you will, that is distinctly my own. It is my footprint in this life.

**CBM**: What do you hope your fans get from your work?

**Beck**: Above all, I hope people walk away from my work with the feeling of being entertained.

*Those wishing to learn more about the work and career of this wide-ranging artist should go to* ***www.DavidMichaelBeck.com****, his home on the World Wide Web.*

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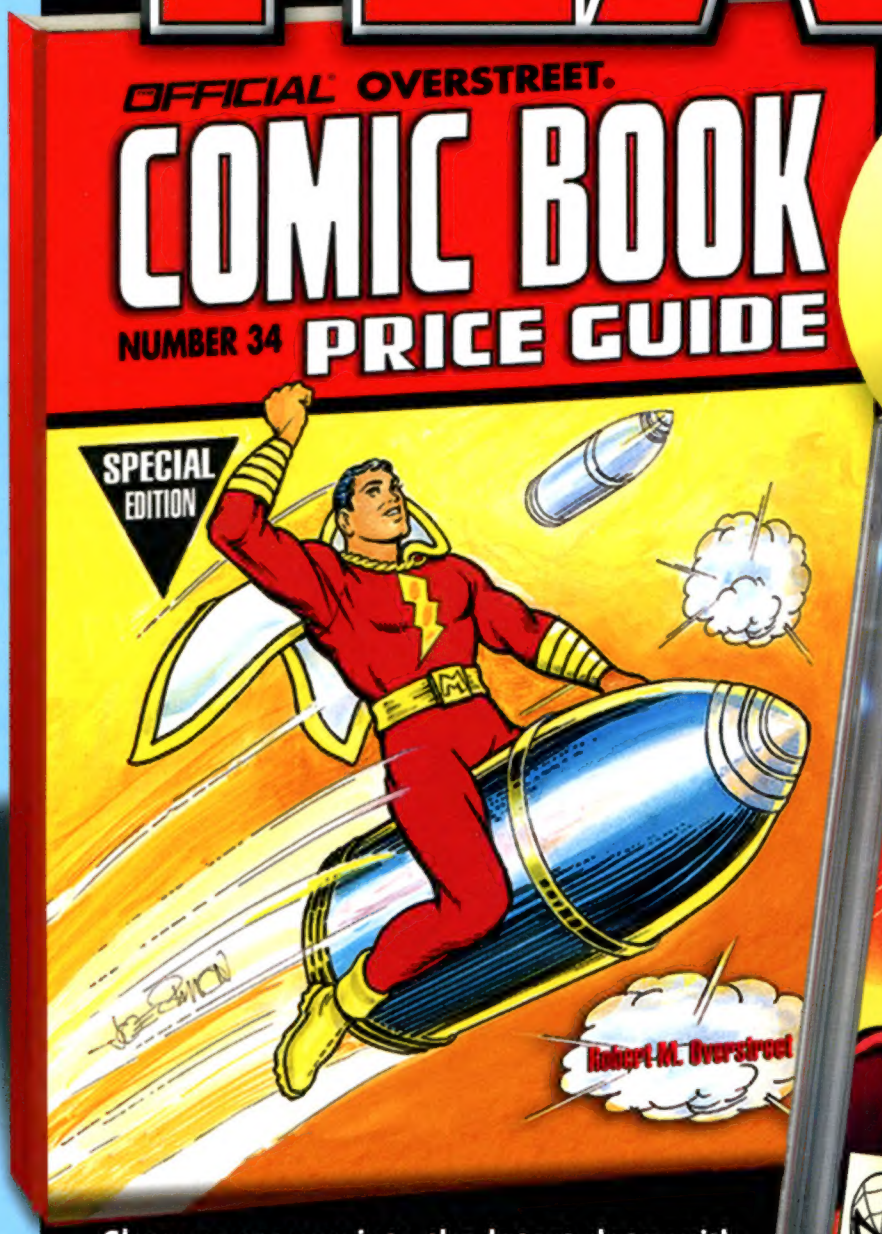


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